

## ARTICLE V.

## RESTRICTED COMMUNION.

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BAPTISTS, as is well known, do not think themselves at liberty to invite members of other denominations to unite with them in the Communion, or to accept such invitations when given in churches of other denominations. This is restricted or strict communion; popularly called "close communion," with a latent suggestion in that term of narrowness and bigotry. Sometimes the latent suggestion develops into open and bitter reproach.

It is the object of this article to present the facts and principles which furnish the reasons for restricted communion. It is commonly supposed, I think, that there is a radical difference between Baptists and evangelical pedobaptists in regard to the principles which underlie this question. This arises, of course, from an obvious difference in practice. In contrast with the practice of Baptists, evangelical pedobaptists invite all members of "orthodox and evangelical churches," intending to include Baptists. It is natural, therefore, for those who judge by appearances, to conclude that Baptist opinions as to the qualifications for communion must be altogether peculiar to themselves, and that the other denominations have a great superiority in respect of liberality and breadth of view. But I think that one who has not carefully examined the subject will be surprised in discovering how far Baptists and evangelical pedobaptists are in substantial agreement as to the principles which determine questions of intercommunion; and how far the actual difference in practice arises from a differ-

ence of views as to certain other and important matters, which, from their nature, must control in the practical application of the principles held in common.

In this discussion I shall assume that each denomination is properly represented by its own authentic statements of belief and by its general practice. There are instances of individual aberration. There are ministers and churches among pedobaptists, tintured with prevailing looseness and lawlessness, who invite "all that love the Lord" or leave every one to judge of his own fitness. So there are a few nominal Baptists who advocate "open communion," openly or covertly; and, possibly, a few Baptist churches which encourage "open communion," without publicly avowing it. But we must look for denominational beliefs in authorized standards or statements and in the practice of the great mass of ministers and churches who are consistent and loyal to their denominational position. Let us then, first of all, look at certain

#### PRINCIPLES COMMON TO ALL,

i. e., accepted by both evangelical pedobaptists and Baptists.

1. *The communion is an ordinance of Christ, established by him to be observed "till he come."* The "Evangelical Alliance" voices the universal belief in recognizing baptism, the communion, and the ministry as divine institutions of permanent and binding authority.

There is one important *corollary* to this principle. An ordinance of Christ must be administered in all respects according to his revealed will. It is, primarily, his table that is spread, not ours; ours only because we are his; and if any error of administration occurs from a mistaken understanding of his will, the case calls for enlightenment, not reproach. Considerations of "liberality and courtesy" are ruled out, except in strict subordination to his authority. To cast reproach on those who are conscientiously carrying out the

Lord's will, as they understand it, is the very quintessence of narrowness and bigotry.

2. *The communion is a church ordinance*, i. e., an ordinance for the church, and to be administered by it and in it. That here and there loose practices prevail, and that a few persons regard the communion as a social Christian observance, proper whenever two or more Christian friends happen to meet, is doubtless true. But that all the religious bodies concerned in this discussion, by their standards and their practice, proclaim the communion to be strictly a church ordinance, is too well known to require quotations and proofs.

It is evident, however, that any serious divergence of views as to the nature, constitution, and membership of the church may seriously affect not only the matter of intercommunion, but other matters of practice as well. Thus Presbyterians can consistently administer the communion at meetings of presbyteries and general assemblies, for they consider the whole body as one great church, and this is done within and by the authority of the Presbyterian Church. Baptists have no such service at their associations and general anniversaries, because their idea of the church as a present and visible organization terminates with the local church. Episcopal clergymen carry the eucharist to the sick and dying, but they do it as ministers of the Protestant Episcopal Church and by its express direction. Baptist ministers do no such thing, because they consider their denomination to be only a community of individual churches, of like faith and practice, "distinct as the billows, but one as the sea." The way in which the end in view is occasionally reached is by the appointment of a special communion season, at an unusual time and place, by a local Baptist church. But evangelical pedobaptists and Baptists are agreed in the principle that the communion is a church ordinance, though other considerations may vary the application of the principle.

3. *The qualifications for occasional communion are the*

*same as for constant communion, i. e., for membership in the local church.*—Perhaps we may not find this principle commonly laid down in these exact words; but it is evident that the denominations concerned in this discussion are substantially agreed in holding it.

In each denomination—whether its theory be that of one corporate body or that of a union of many similar bodies—it is evident that the members of each local church are understood to possess all the qualifications for membership in any other local church, and could be received into it simply by letter or certificate. As Baptists go no farther in intercommunion than this, it is indisputable that they hold the principle now under consideration and act upon it strictly. But evangelical pedobaptists, in inviting members of all “orthodox and evangelical churches,” do not, from their own point of view, violate it. For it is well known that among them persons can pass from one denomination to another without the imposition of any essentially new requirement. Some private inquiries may be made, or public questions asked, in order to a reasonable assurance that the new member is willing to conform to the usages of the church he joins and will not be a disturber of the peace. Baptists have sometimes been known to unite with pedobaptist churches; and whatever may be thought of their consistency (unless their views have undergone a radical change), they are readily received. The Presbyterian Church avowedly acts on the policy of receiving members from other “evangelical churches” by letter, and in no pedobaptist denomination, so far as I know, is any one, not even a Baptist, required formally to repudiate his beliefs, or to acknowledge that his former church relationship involved a serious error. Evangelical pedobaptists do not intend, by “open communion,” as they practise it, to violate the principle that the terms of communion and of membership are, in essence, precisely the same. This principle is obviously correct; a church, in its invitations, ought not to

nullify its own teachings and discriminate against its own members. Serious differences of opinion as to what the terms of church-membership are, might, and I think must, seriously affect the question of denominational intercommunion. But the principle itself—whatever variations may arise in its application—will not, I am sure, be seriously questioned.

4. *Baptism is a prerequisite to church-membership, and so to communion.*—The Episcopal Church gives this direction in the Prayer-book, “And there shall none be admitted to the Holy Communion, until such time as he be confirmed, or be ready and desirous to be confirmed.”<sup>1</sup> All such have been taught to say, in answer to the second question of the Catechism, “My sponsors in baptism; wherein I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.” Terrible as this answer seems to me in its teaching of delusion, it leaves no room for doubt that baptism is held to be indispensable to membership and communion. Presbyterians believe that baptism “is the initiatory rite of the Christian church.” “Communicants [i. e., all Presbyterian church-members] in good and regular standing” are to be admitted to the communion. “It is customary to invite all Christians present . . . who are in good and regular standing in other evangelical churches,” and who, of course, are considered as baptized. “But ‘it is not in accordance with the spirit and usage of the Presbyterian Church to extend such invitations’ to persons who are not members of

<sup>1</sup> This direction, literally interpreted, would seem to require strict communion of a very decided type, for it would shut out all but Episcopalians, and perhaps Romanists. But the questions, whether the great majority of Episcopalians can fairly be called “evangelical Christians,” and whether the Episcopal Church is “open” or “close” on the communion question, does not affect in the least the force of my argument in respect to the general belief and practice of evangelical pedobaptists. Perhaps Episcopal clergymen do not refuse the communion to persons of other denominations, wishing to receive it and “meekly kneeling on their knees.”

any evangelical church."<sup>1</sup> The position of the Methodist Church is substantially the same.<sup>2</sup> Congregationalists hold that the communion is a privilege of baptized church-members; and in inviting other "evangelical Christians," invite them as baptized persons. It is well known that Baptists insist that baptism is an essential, though not the only, prerequisite to church-membership and communion.

In fact, next to nobody takes any other ground except those who are called "open-communion Baptists." As these cannot yet accept anything as baptism but immersion, and are determined to reject restricted communion, no course is open to them except to deny that baptism is prerequisite to communion. In doing this they are obliged to reject not only what is obviously New Testament teaching, but also what is universally received in Christendom—evangelical and unevangelical.

There may be latitudinarians among pedobaptists who do not scruple to depart from their own standards. But Christendom, as a whole, always has been, and is, univocal on this point. The belief that baptism is prerequisite to communion is no more a Baptist peculiarity than the belief in the forgiveness of sins.

It is clear, however, that a difference of opinion as to the act of baptism, its subjects or design—any or all of these—would necessarily affect in the gravest manner the question of intercommunion.

5. *An orderly walk in the church is prerequisite to the communion.*—An orderly walk is substantially the same thing as being a member in good and regular standing. Such a member is known or presumed to be living in accordance with the commands of Christ and the obligations of church-membership, and to be free from such derelictions of duty, or

<sup>1</sup> See Hodge's *What is Presbyterian Law*, pp. 82, 90, 91, and foot-notes.

<sup>2</sup> See *Methodist Discipline*, ¶¶ 17, 42, 47, 544.

such inconsistencies in doctrine or practice, as require censure from the church. A fair specimen of the general position is found in the rule of the Methodist Church: "No person shall be admitted to the Lord's Supper among us, who is guilty of any practice for which we would exclude a member of our church."<sup>1</sup>

But it is important to notice that two questions are really involved in this matter of an orderly walk; viz.: (1) Does one walk orderly according to the standard of his own church? (2) Is that standard right?—in other words, Is the church itself in New Testament order? For if the church itself has departed from the commands of Christ, especially as to doctrine, constitution, terms of membership, and requirements, then a member may be orderly according to his church's standard, yet far from orderly according to the New Testament standard. Now all agree that some things are indispensable to New Testament order; the minimum would be, in the view of evangelical pedobaptists, whatever is implied in the expression "orthodox and evangelical churches." They would not, for example, accept as substantially in gospel order a body which denies all ordinances and a stated ministry (as the Quakers), or fundamental orthodox doctrines (as the Unitarians and Universalists), or which approves polygamy (as the Mormons). From this it appears evident that serious differences as to what constitutes gospel order and an orderly walk in the church must have a decisive influence on the question of intercommunion. For no church can consistently invite persons to the communion whose position and practice are such that they could not be received into its membership. But all are agreed in the general principle, though the application may vary according to the views held of what constitutes gospel order, of what is indispensable to it.

I think no one can doubt that if Baptists and evangelical pedobaptists had a community of belief in all respects as

<sup>1</sup> See Methodist Discipline, directions prefixed to ¶ 545; also ¶ 544.

complete as they have in respect to the five principles just stated, there could be no question about the propriety of unrestricted intercommunion; indeed fusion into one body would be only a question of time. Unfortunately this is far from being the case. It is necessary, therefore, next to consider three

#### PRINCIPLES PECULIAR TO BAPTISTS

which, as we shall see, must necessarily control the application of the principles above stated in determining the question of intercommunion with pedobaptists.

1. *The spirituality of the church.*—All who believe in supernatural Christianity and a divinely instituted church must believe in spiritual grace and blessings and in the working of the Holy Spirit; and so, to a certain extent, in the spiritual character of the church. But the Baptist principle under consideration is much more radical and thoroughgoing; and is, in reality, the one thing characteristic and determinative of the Baptist position in all respects. I am happy to have this opportunity of stating it.

We believe that every true Christian is such by virtue of a new life, in union with Christ, originated and sustained by the Holy Spirit. He is a regenerate, a spiritual man. This new life is not the old life, developed, reformed, modified, improved, or reconstructed. It is a *new* life, the work of the Holy Spirit in the use of the word of God; it will never be destroyed, though it may be dwarfed or perverted for a time. It will abide forever, it will be perfected in glory.

In like manner we believe that the church, according to the New Testament, is a purely spiritual body, created and energized by the Holy Spirit, existing on earth, but destined to be perfected in glory. It is not anything previously existing, as the Hebrew commonwealth, developed, reformed, modified, improved, or reconstructed. It would be a good statement to say, that the germ of the church is found in the identification of Christ with his people by his baptism followed

by the anointing with the Holy Spirit; its nucleus or embryo, in Christ and his apostles, and later in the waiting company in the upper chamber; its birth, on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit organized and fused old disciples and new into one living body. Before Christ there were pious men, in whom was the principle of a new life, developed so far as the existing stage of the history of redemption would permit, but there was no church. Israel was not a church, but type and shadow of the church. From this it follows that the church in its earthly manifestation should be absolutely spiritual; membership, ministry, ordinances, worship, polity, work,—all spiritual. The church cannot be evolved from a community of natural men, or from individuals, by education or any other means short of regeneration. The church has nothing to do with the state or with politics; no mission to rule, reform, or regenerate the world, in the present evil age. Its one mission is to serve Christ in the Spirit, to train its members for glory, to seek the salvation of sinners. It must pursue spiritual ends by spiritual means. All kinds of secular good follow its successes, but incidentally, not as part of its work. Those Baptists who have different conceptions of the mission of the church, and are uniting with others in secularizing the church and its activities, are lamentably ignorant or regardless of the foundation principle of their own denomination. Moreover no person is rightfully a member of the church unless he is spiritual, i. e., regenerated by the Holy Spirit; and no ordinance, observance, or act of worship can have any value except as it expresses and increases the knowledge, obedience, and holy emotions of regenerate souls. The preaching of the gospel can have no saving effect on the unregenerate, unless the Spirit of God opens their hearts to receive and obey. Ordinances and forms applied to them are unmeaning, misleading, and hurtful.

Therefore Baptists receive no one to membership, in any sense, except those who give evidence of regeneration by a

credible profession of faith in Christ, and submission to him. We cannot read the heart, are sometimes deceived, may sometimes be careless; but there is not a real Baptist church on earth which ever receives a member without what is considered sufficient or presumptive evidence that he is a regenerate soul. We know nothing of a church composed of believers and their children; of having the form and seeking the power of godliness; of coming into the church to find salvation or as probationers; of infants growing up to be church-members; of natural men receiving baptism in order to obtain forgiveness. We baptize believers in Christ, not to originate the new life, but to express, and in expressing to consummate, the commencement of a new life already begun in the heart by the Holy Spirit.

This explains our attitude towards infant baptism. It is not merely that we find no warrant for it in the New Testament. That would, indeed, be decisive with us against the practice. But it is abhorrent to us because we see in it a fearful violation of the fundamental idea of the church. Infants, incapable of faith and regeneration, are supposed by it to be made church-members or quasi church-members, or to be acknowledged as such. They are supposed to be regenerated in baptism, or, if not regenerated, to be brought into a covenant with God, which it will be their duty later to ratify. In its older and stronger form it fills the church with unconverted members, effaces the distinction between the church and the world, and leads millions blindfold to perdition. It has corrupted the church in every way, and is "the pillar and ground of popery." In its milder and modern form it dulls the sense of distinction between the natural and the spiritual; tends to the reception of "the baptized children of the church" to "full membership" more easily than is the case with others; obliterates the meaning of baptism as a symbol of death to the old life and rising to the new; nullifies the command to each new convert to arise and be baptized.

And it has an innate tendency to gravitate towards the other and more dangerous type. Therefore we bear unceasing testimony against it; we can give it no recognition as Christian baptism. This is just as true when infants are immersed (as in the Greek Church) as in any other case. The principle of the pure spirituality of the church puts a ban upon it.

Now, holding these convictions, Baptists must act upon them. We receive to membership only those who profess faith in Christ and a change of heart, and who submit to baptism, which, as the voluntary and spiritual act of the person baptized, expresses that faith and that change. But now, if we were to invite to the communion members of all evangelical pedobaptist churches, we should have to receive many baptized (as is alleged) in unconscious infancy; some, perhaps, who know no other regeneration but baptismal regeneration; many who, though regenerate, could not be received as members among us, because they have never expressed their spiritual character by being buried with Christ in baptism and raised to walk with him in newness of life. How possibly, then, can we practise this intercommunion? And, if restricted communion brings some unpleasant misconceptions and reproaches, we feel compensated for that by the testimony, known and felt by all men, which it enables us to give to the great, fundamental principle of New Testament Christianity.

2. *Baptism is immersion, and immersion only.*—We assert that the words used in the original Greek of the New Testament, and appearing transferred in the common English version as “baptize,” “baptism,” etc., are equivalent in meaning to “immerse,” “immersion,” etc., and were so understood, and correctly understood, by the primitive Christians.

In support of this assertion we call, as witnesses, the standard Greek lexicons; Greek usage, classic, patristic, and modern; the rituals and requirements of the ancient Greek and Latin churches, the earlier Anglican, the Greek down to the present day; ancient versions; ecclesiastical history and arch-

æology; and the general consensus of modern scholarship.<sup>1</sup> We also appeal to the fact, that, though the exact meaning of the original terms is veiled in the common English version by transfer instead of translation, and occasionally obscured by a misuse of prepositions, nevertheless the descriptions, circumstances, symbolisms, and allusions make it very plain, to an attentive reader, that baptism is immersion, and that sprinkling and pouring are out of the question. Hence the New Testament, even in this version, is the most powerful book in existence in sustaining our views of baptism.

We, then, regard the command to baptize and to be baptized as precisely equivalent to a command to immerse and to be immersed. Holding, in common with all Christendom, that baptism is prerequisite to church-membership and to communion, and perfectly convinced that nothing is baptism but immersion, we must of necessity hold that immersion is prerequisite to church-membership and to communion, and act accordingly. How any candid man can wonder at this, or ask Baptists to change their practice, unless he can convince them of error in their definition of baptism, passes my comprehension.

3. *Christ is supreme and sole lawgiver for the church.*—All Christians would probably agree that Christ's authority is supreme. We assert, also, that it is *sole*—there is no other. We find that authority in the New Testament, and the New Testament alone. We can admit no modification on the authority of popes, councils, creeds, church organizations, custom, courtesy, or convenience. Whatever was important enough for Christ to command is important enough for us to

<sup>1</sup> Much of this testimony, including Greek usage exhaustively, versions, rituals, concessions, etc., is compactly arranged in a little work of exceedingly great value, "Baptizein: its Meaning and Uses," by T. J. Conant, D. D. With patient research and scholarly impartiality, he gathers and classifies the original sources of information, and places them, with English translations, before the reader's eye, to speak for themselves.

obey; that, as far as we can ascertain, we must teach and do; that,—nothing more, nothing less, nothing else; even if this obedience should leave us alone among professing Christians.

In settling, then, for ourselves, the question of intercommunion, we can consult no human authority or general custom, nor swerve even to keep the good-will of Christian men. If the church of Christ is purely spiritual, if baptism is immersion, if Christ is the sole lawgiver, then fidelity to the faith once for all delivered to the saints, leaves us no option. And so we are prepared to formulate the

#### BAPTIST VIEW AS TO QUALIFICATIONS FOR COMMUNION.

These qualifications are:—

1. *Regeneration*; the evidence of regeneration being a credible profession of faith in Christ.
2. *Baptism*, i. e., the immersion of a believer in Jesus Christ.
3. *An orderly walk in the church*.—Members in good and regular standing in the local Baptist church, and in other churches of the same faith and order, are presumably walking orderly in the church.

Beyond this we cannot consistently go; for membership in evangelical pedobaptist churches is not *prima facie* evidence of possessing these qualifications. Many, we joyfully acknowledge, are regenerate; but most, in our view, are unbaptized; and none, in our view, are walking orderly in a church in gospel order. It is our conviction, that all Christians ought to believe and practise, strictly, according to the New Testament, and that, if this could be so, there would be no need of restricted communion. As it is, we are shut up to it; there is no other course open to us, unless we are prepared to violate our solemn convictions of truth and duty.

This will, possibly, appear in even a stronger form, if we notice

## TWO SUGGESTED ALTERNATIVES.

1. *First Alternative: Relegating all responsibility to the communicant;* i. e., teaching our views, but inviting or encouraging all who judge themselves qualified to partake on their own responsibility.

To some this may seem an easy way out, and they may adopt it directly or by a significant silence. But, in the light of the preceding discussion, the objections are insuperable. (1) It nullifies our teachings. We might just as well proclaim immersion to be the only baptism, and then receive as members all who consider themselves as baptized. (2) It countervenes the principle that the qualifications for membership and for communion are the same, and (3) so discriminates against our own members. (4) It renders nugatory our testimony to the truth. (5) It makes church discipline a farce. Members excluded, even for heinous sins, would be at liberty to commune; excommunication would be a nullity. (6) It is abdication by the church of its rightful authority as custodian of the ordinances. (7) It would put Baptists in a unique position, unknown in Christendom, and perfectly preposterous, for the sake of a kind of "open communion" not likely, as I judge, to command the respect of evangelical pedobaptists or anybody else.

2. *Second Alternative: Relaxing the terms of occasional communion on account of altered circumstances.*—The plea is that neglect of immersion, and failure to walk in gospel order, do not mean, in the present division and confusion, what they would have meant in primitive times, viz., wilful disobedience to Christ. Therefore Christian charity requires us not to debar from the table pious Christians honestly mistaken; while we must continue to teach the truth.

Conceding in large measure the correctness of the premises, the conclusion is seen to be untenable, in the light of the preceding discussion. The first four objections to the

First Alternative, and the sixth, have equal force against this course. And the following additional objections lie against it: (1) Soon, as the logical outcome, "honestly mistaken Christians" would be admitted to membership. (2) All this countervenes the principle that Christ is sole lawgiver for the church. (3) Instead of governing ourselves by the teachings of the New Testament, which is a plain and defensible rule, we should be compelled to sit in judgment on motives and as to the extent of aberration admissible; questions to the last degree perplexing, and which Christ has never authorized his churches to adjudicate. (4) We should find no stopping-place. Fatal error might be fellowshiped after a time. It is far more dangerous and demoralizing to put error on an equal footing with truth than it is to accept error as truth, by mistake of judgment. There is only one safe way for church or Christians, and that is to follow the truth unflinchingly, according to their best judgment of what the truth is and of what it requires. Nor is it probable that "open communion," on the plan just stated, would be altogether agreeable to those for whose sake it would be adopted. They might prefer our present practice to one in which they would be received as erring brethren covered by the mantle of charity, and needing to "be taught the way of the Lord more perfectly."

It is entirely clear that Baptists, so long as they hold those convictions that make them Baptists, are shut up to restricted communion. Restricted communion is inevitable and easily defensible, if Baptist principles are defensible.

But perhaps we might go further and consider—

#### THE ADVANTAGES OF RESTRICTED COMMUNION.

The suggestion of such an idea may startle and even shock the reader. It will startle those who, forced to confess that restricted communion is defensible and inevitable for Baptists, see in it an unfortunate emphasizing of differences, and deplore the fact that it separates regenerate persons

at the Lord's table and grieves many pious hearts. It will shock those who regard "close communion" as the one great fault and blemish of the Baptist denomination. Yet let us look at the matter candidly.

Restricted communion advantageous? No, not absolutely. If all who love the Lord could see eye to eye, there would be indeed "one Lord, one faith, one baptism," and so one communion, and presently one body; a consummation, so far as we can judge, devoutly to be wished for. Restricted communion advantageous? Yes, relatively, as things are now. In supporting this statement I shall, of course, assume that Baptist views, as set forth in this article, are correct.

1. Restricted communion is a *signal token of loyalty to Christ*. The practice is offensive to many, sometimes brings pain to ourselves. We adhere to it from a sense of duty to Christ. It is not a light thing that in this age of looseness and disloyalty, there should be given such an unmistakable exemplification of the principle of absolute loyalty to Christ and his word. I am happy to know that some eminent and candid pedobaptists take this view of the matter. They do not agree with our premises; but they appreciate our consistency and the example we set of abiding at all hazards by what we believe to be the teaching of the New Testament.

2. Restricted communion furnishes an *unmistakable and effective testimony to the truth*, especially to the spirituality of the church, the obligation to be immersed, and the sole authority of Christ in his church. I feel sure that in this fact really lies the offence of "close communion." Denominational intercommunion does not appear to be very highly prized (except as a matter of sentiment), or to be extensively practised, even among those bodies which can consistently allow it. Most persons are satisfied with the privileges of their own church. Professed Christians seem to account it no great evil to be divided as to baptism, doctrine, and polity, and to belong to different denominations. Why consider it so great

an evil not to be able to commune together? Why so great sensitiveness about restricted communion? I think the answer is obvious. If Baptists would only practise "open communion," their position would really and practically be this, "We prefer immersion, believe it to be primitive and expressive, we are not ready to practise infant baptism, we are not prepared to receive members except by immersion; but we are not thoroughly sure about all this; we do not deem it of vital importance, and we are willing to accept sprinkling and pouring as "modes<sup>1</sup> of baptism" virtually sufficient for others, and to waive our objections to infant baptism, at least so far as to admit that it does not seriously invalidate church order." We should thus place our peculiarities on about the same basis as that on which, e. g., the Presbyterian Church places its polity, as being most nearly scriptural, but not essential.<sup>2</sup> Other denominations would bear with our peculiarities, we with theirs, and all would go along comfortably together, according to the idea, so often expressed, that all denominational differences are matters of minor importance—all "evangelical" denominations being "regiments of the same army," in pretty good order, "the collective church," as it has been put.

But restricted communion proclaims to the world that the pure spirituality of the church is a vital principle; that infant baptism is itself a grievous corruption of Christianity,

<sup>1</sup> No Baptist, who knows and remembers what he is about, ever uses the expression "mode of baptism." It begs the very question at issue, which is: What *is* baptism? What is the *act* of baptism? If the answer be, Baptism is pouring, sprinkling, or immersion, then these can consistently enough be called "modes of baptism." But we deny the correctness of this answer *in toto*. The use of the expression "mode of baptism" is therefore an absurdity for a Baptist or in a discussion between Baptists and pedobaptists, unless one means the mode of immersion, as by dipping forward or backward. Equally foolish is it for a Baptist to speak of "baptism by immersion," i. e., immersion by immersion.

<sup>2</sup> See Hodge's What is Presbyterian Law, pp. 11, 12, 29.

and the prolific parent of many more; that there is no baptism but immersion; that Christ's teachings, as found in the New Testament, must not be altered, amended, or waived; that all churches that violate these principles are essentially out of gospel order, and that Baptists are, in many respects, "a people alone," and bound to be alone until these principles are generally accepted. This testimony is distasteful to others; hence the offence of "close communion"; but if it is a true testimony, it is valuable and must be given. And would evangelical pedobaptists like us better if we should show ourselves to be hypocrites and cowards?

3. *Restricted communion preserves the parity, meaning, and order of the ordinances.*—It has come about, as the result of the perversion of baptism and the controversy about "close communion," that the communion has been exalted in importance at the expense of baptism. It is not important that Christians should have the same baptism, if they can only commune together! It is not important to have the advantages of a true baptism, if we can only have the supreme privilege of communion, especially of communion together! And so the secondary function of the communion, viz., to express *joint* fellowship with Christ, has been exaggerated; the communion is distorted into an expression of fellowship with each other, as the principal thing, to the neglect of the main idea of *fellowship with Christ*. And then pedobaptist and also "open-communion" views belittle baptism, lose sight of its meaning, disturb or sever the relation of the two ordinances, completely obliterate the significance of their order. Immersion marks the beginning of a new life in Christ, communion its continuance and renewal. Immersion means *we in Christ*, communion *Christ in us*. Restricted communion restores the proper conception of all this; and emphasizes it.

4. *Restricted communion is useful in accentuating the distinction between church-fellowship and Christian fellowship.*—I know that a labored attack on Baptist practice

has been made based on the denial of this distinction. But undeniable facts show that such a distinction exists. An orthodox Quaker and a strict Presbyterian, both being regenerate men, can and do have Christian fellowship in many things; in prayer for example. But they can have no church fellowship; not merely do not, but cannot. The Quaker rejects church, stated ministry, and ordinances. Fellowship is impossible without community. Christian fellowship, in a measure, exists; church fellowship cannot. So a converted person in my congregation, awaiting baptism, can have no church fellowship with me. He is not a church-member, not a communicant, has nothing to do with church affairs. Will any man, however, have the hardihood to deny that he and I can and do have Christian fellowship in prayer, love, and even in our views of church order? The distinction is a valid one. Accurately speaking, church fellowship is a part of Christian fellowship, real or presumptive; but all Christian fellowship is not church fellowship.

That Baptists are always consistent I do not affirm. They do not exchange letters of dismission with other denominations. This is consistent. But if pedobaptist ordination is ever accepted as all-sufficient for a Baptist minister; if pedobaptist ministers are ever invited to act officially in ecclesiastical matters, as ordinations or the constitution of a church; if Baptists ever engage in "evangelistic" or other "union" work on terms which imply suppression or sacrifice of the truth;—then they are so far inconsistent. But I think these things are not true of the mass of the Baptist denomination. I have myself lived for many years by the side of pedobaptist ministers in good neighborhood, sometimes in warm friendship. But I have always believed it best for Baptists to do their own work in their own way, with love and good wishes for all, but without those "entangling alliances" which seem to me unfavorable both to the truth and to peace. Certainly it is folly to argue in the face of obvious facts, that

there can be no recognized distinction between church fellowship and Christian fellowship, because Baptists may not in every instance accurately observe that distinction, while they make it, proclaim it, and generally act upon it.

The making of this distinction is of serious importance, apart from the communion question. The denial of it is akin to the belief that salvation is impossible without church-membership. This belief introduces unregenerate men into the church for salvation, and produces formalism and self-delusion. The importance of baptism and church-membership should not be undervalued. Men should not be encouraged in the hope of leading a Christian life outside the church. But it is good to emphasize the fact that piety is wrought in the soul by the Holy Spirit, and that Christian fellowship can exist in a large degree, especially in present circumstances, apart from church fellowship.

5. *Restricted communion is for the benefit of other Christians.*—The truth is just as important to them as to Baptists. Error with them has wrought great evils in the past, and is capable of working equal evils in the future. The influence of Baptist teachings has done good in partly neutralizing certain inherent tendencies, that have been fruitful for evil in the past, and are so now in many churches and countries. Why, for example, do so many evangelical pedobaptists, now and here, accept the separation of church and state, believe in religious liberty, and insist on some evidence of regeneration in order to "full membership"? How comes it that their church authorities are lamenting the growing neglect of infant baptism? We are doing them good, which would be mostly prevented but for our consistency in restricted communion. We show by that that we are in earnest in our Baptist principles; and are, at the same time, in Christian fellowship with all good men in the things wherein we are agreed. This attitude is best for the truth; best for harmony and peace.

6. *Restricted communion is favorable to Christian union.*—It puts an insuperable barrier in the way of a false and unprincipled “union” sentiment, which calls for union by compromise. Such union, dishonoring to Christ, destructive of principle, hollow, and sure to end in hopeless disruptions, must indefinitely postpone real union. All hope of real union—union in the truth—lies in the way of honest study of the word of God and straightforward fidelity in obeying it.

7. *Restricted communion is good for the world.*—Evils may result from divisions. But, while divisions exist, it is good that, in the practice of one denomination, this blind and self-deceiving world should see a positive and unmistakable testimony to the truth that nothing is of any value in religion but that which is spiritual—regeneration and its fruits, the obedience of a spiritual man to Christ, the new life, the authority of the New Testament, the work of the Holy Spirit. If the world asks, What means restricted communion? our answer is, that it means precisely that. This testimony deals a heavy blow to all carnal, ritualistic, hereditary, and formal religion, so acceptable to natural men, but so fatal to them.

8. *Restricted communion is good for Baptists.*—It keeps them in their true position, and when they abide there most strictly, then are they most prosperous. Whenever they falter or compromise, the result is decay and death. Indeed—

#### OPEN COMMUNION IS BAPTIST SUICIDE.

It is easy to trace the downward steps which would conduct the denomination or a church from a vigorous life to the grave.—The *first step* would be to invite to the communion “all immersed believers,” meaning to include the few immersed members of pedobaptist churches. But how invidious to make distinctions among members of the same church, all of whom, if any, are out of gospel order, because the church itself is out of gospel order! So comes the *second step*, “open communion,” in the full ordinary sense. But why receive to

occasional communion and debar from permanent communion, i. e., membership? So the *third step*, reception as members of persons not immersed. Now the Baptist church is dead—it has wholly abandoned its Baptist position—is Baptist only in name. Again, all adult male members should be held eligible for office, and so the *fourth step*, the election of unbaptized men as deacons and other church officers. By this time baptism (i. e., immersion) is no longer publicly taught and advocated, and it is administered rather quietly, on a week night, so as to avoid offence and reproof to the unbaptized members and officers. The *fifth step* is now easy, the election of a pedobaptist pastor; and then quickly follows the *sixth step*, the change of name and denominational affiliation. Now the burial, after a spiritual inquest, with the verdict: *suicide by open communion*. Lay the lifeless form of the dead Baptist church in the tomb, “unwept, unhonored, and unsung”! There is however a speedy resurrection; and the newly risen body is a full-fledged pedobaptist church.

This is not a fancy sketch. I have known at least one such case; probably others have occurred in this country. It would be easy, no doubt, to find this process in all stages and in its consummation in England, where a part of the Baptists have long practised “open communion.”

Equally fatal to all Baptist efficiency are “open-communion” sentiments in the case of individuals. If a man is brave, he advocates his belief, tries to change the position of his denomination, fails, re-examines his belief on other points, finds the heart of his Baptist faith eaten out, with amazing facility joins another denomination. If he is not brave, he advocates his sentiments cautiously, with abundant regard to the maxim, “discretion is the better part of valor,” accomplishes nothing, and is powerless to defend or advance that part of Baptist belief which he is supposed still feebly to hold.

Now I frankly say, that, agreeable to some as it might

be for the Baptist denomination to commit suicide, such an event is just now improbable. Should we ever become convinced that our distinguishing principles are untenable or unimportant, I hope we shall have grace to acknowledge it, to confess that inadvertently we have been guilty of causing schism in the body of Christ, and to abandon our separate existence. But as long as we believe that these principles are true and of immense importance, nay more, that they are of the very essence of New Testament Christianity, and that these truths are put in our trust for the honor of Christ and the good of all Christians and all men, it becomes us to maintain our Baptist attitude unflinchingly and evermore. Surely no good man can advisedly reproach us for doing this, or ask us to be faithless and false.

In this article I have used great plainness of speech, but I trust, in candor, courtesy, and Christian love. I present this defence of restricted communion with nothing of the elation characteristic of the neophyte in polemics. The lessons of history teach how hard it is to change long-established opinions and practices. Study of human nature prepares one properly to estimate the force of education, preconception, and prejudice. If there is ever to be a cordial and intelligent union of all true believers, it can only come by a slow process; by the melting away of error and misconception in a common view of the truth, through the candid study of the New Testament under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It seems to me that the signs of the times are not propitious as to progress in this direction; on the contrary, ominous portents appear, increasing in number and intensity, of much greater evils than the differences hitherto separating Baptists and pedobaptists; and I am grieved to say that they appear to some extent in my own denomination as well as in others.

I see that among professed Christians generally the interest in knowing exactly what the Bible teaches, and the

rugged determination to obey that teaching, are rapidly declining. Commands on important matters, formerly accepted without question, are openly disregarded in the name of expediency and "progress," or for the sake of popular modern "fads"; while precepts of men are exalted to the position of divine requirements, often making void the commandments of God. Under the specious name of "higher criticism," the doctrine of infallible inspiration is denied, the authenticity of the Old Testament is questioned, its histories and laws are represented as myths and forgeries, its prophets are rated as little more than reformers and politicians. The indorsement of the ancient Scriptures, as the very word of God, by Christ and his apostles is discredited. In a "new theology," which has as its centre the incarnation of Christ and the "life of humanity," instead of the resurrection of Christ and a new life, the doctrines of law and justice, of man's fall, depravity, and ruined estate, of the atonement, of sovereign grace, of the second coming and kingdom of Christ, and of eternal retribution, are modified and emptied of their solemn significance as taught in the Bible. Christianity is thus diluted into a sentimental religion founded on "the universal fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man," and the distinction between the regenerate and the unregenerate is largely effaced. Evolutionary naturalism is taking the place of supernatural Christianity, and enthroning itself in theology; and in some quarters Hindu Pantheism, the oldest and deadliest foe, not only of Christianity, but of theism, now renamed Monism, masquerades as the philosophic ally and exponent of that Faith to which it is in absolute and unchangeable antagonism. Meantime ministers and churches are vying with each other in secularizing Christianity, as to its aims and activities, in the vain attempt to rule, reform, and regenerate the world, in this present evil age, by carnal means—politics, sociology, and even socialism. Many, in accord with the prevailing materialism of the day, "mind earthly things," and urge us to remit our supreme de-

votion to the salvation of souls, and to devote our Christian labor to the improvement of the temporal condition of men and of society. And that holy city, which is to descend from God out of heaven, for which good men have looked ever since the days of Abraham, is caricatured by a dream of better earthly municipalities and an improved condition of church and state for mortal men; the final outcome of redemption being a kingdom without a king, a kingdom where sin and death will still exist and funeral trains will pass over streets of gold, as "men die and go to heaven" from the New Jerusalem, where, as we had fondly thought, death is to be no more and the overcoming believer is to go no more out forever.

It is evident that a great defection from the faith is in the air, which, if unchecked, will bring on an apostasy worse than that of Rome. Whether after a time the Spirit of the Lord will raise up a standard against the enemy, or whether these are the "perilous times" so solemnly foretold in the New Testament, and we now see "the beginning of the end," it is impossible to say. But, beyond all doubt, worldliness and error are coming in like a flood, and in the same proportion the hope of a union of professed Christians in the truth is receding before our eyes like the mocking mirage of the desert.

It may be that in days to come the question discussed in this article will cease to be of interest to the mass of nominal Christians. Indeed, of what consequence is it with whom men commune, or whether they commune at all, if every thing that makes the communion significant and precious is abandoned? It is of little use to guard the casket after the resplendent and priceless jewel is gone.

Be this as it may, and whatever may be the future of my own or any other denomination, in one thing I am serenely confident, the foundation of God stands fast, having this seal: The Lord knows those that are his. He will have a faithful people to the end, even if it be a little flock. And the greater

the defection from the faith, the more separate must this people be, and the more emphatic their testimony to the truth. The greater the prevalence of error, and the more complete the perversion of Christianity, the more certain and necessary must it be that restricted communion shall remain, as a witness to the truth, until the Lord come.

Then restricted communion, like everything else that is "in part," will be done away. The church will embrace all the regenerate, purified from sin and error, beyond the possibility of misunderstanding or separation. It will be perfected, glorified, enthroned. For now we see as in a mirror, obscurely, but then face to face. Now we know in part, but then shall we know fully, even as we are fully known.