

Notes on the Institution of the Sacrament of Baptism.

BY THE REV. JOHN ROBSON, D.D., EDINBURGH.

WHILE there are in the New Testament four accounts of the institution of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, there is only one of the institution of that of Baptism. It must therefore be studied with special care as showing its nature and purpose. While other passages may be studied as showing how others looked on it, this is the only passage which is authoritative, as showing the mind of Him who instituted it; and these other passages must be interpreted in its light.

Relation to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.—Generally, we speak of Baptism as the Sacrament of initiation into the Christian faith, and the Lord's Supper as that of its complete acceptance, and continuance in it: Baptism first, the Lord's Supper after. But this is not the order of institution: the Lord's Supper was instituted first, Baptism afterwards. Still less is it the order of significance. The Lord's Supper was instituted on the eve of the Crucifixion, to symbolize the forgiveness of sins secured thereby; Baptism was instituted on the eve of the Ascension, to symbolize the everlasting spiritual presence of Christ with His redeemed Church, secured thereby. The one is the Sacrament of the Christian life, the other that of Christian service—not the ordinary service of daily life, but the supreme service to which the Church is called, of winning the world for Christ. **It is the Sacrament of the Great Commission.** And so we see how it has come to be regarded as the Sacrament of initiation. While Baptism is for the Church the crown of her union with Christ, symbolizing her co-working with Him for the salvation of the world, it is for the world the introduction to the School of Christ, symbolizing the powers by which the nations are to be made disciples of Christ.

Terms of the Institution.—The institution of Baptism comes in as part of the great Commission,

'And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All authority hath been given me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to obey all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.'
—Matt. xxviii. 18-20.

and the whole of the Commission must be studied to enable us to see the force of the clause appointing Baptism. This Commission is given in parallelisms. It begins with the claim by Christ, 'All authority hath been given me in heaven and on earth'; and corresponding with this is the promise of the closing clause, 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.' Following the claim to authority comes the Commission to His Church, 'Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations'; and before the closing promise comes the appointment of the appropriate means, 'Teaching them to obey all things whatsoever I commanded you.' The Commission, then, to the Church is one to make disciples of all the nations by the authority of Christ, and to do so by means of teaching the things which He commanded, depending on His promised presence. There is thus to be the union of the divine and the human in the discipling of the world. In the midst of the Commission, between the claim of our Lord to authority and His Commission to His Church, on the one hand, and His appointment of the means and promise of His presence, on the other, comes the institution of the ordinance, 'Baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost,' symbolizing that union of the divine and human.

The Aim of Baptism is the same as the aim of the great Commission, of which it forms a part; it is to 'make disciples.' It may be said that a true disciple is one who is regenerated, so that Baptism may be said to be a means towards regeneration. To this I have no objection, but it is better to keep within the terms of the Institution. Baptism, then, is a means towards making a disciple. What is necessary towards the making of a disciple? There is giving him knowledge of the truth to be obeyed, and giving him power to obey it. The

former is accomplished by the Church giving her teaching, the latter is accomplished by Christ giving His Spirit.

Baptism the Seal of a Covenant.—How then does Baptism accomplish, or help to accomplish, this end? It neither teaches the truth, nor does it give the Holy Spirit. It introduces 'into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' And what this means we see if we look at what has practically taken the place of the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—the name of Christ. When any one is baptized, that is the outward token that he is entered into Christ, or, in other words, that he is a Christian. 'Baptizing into the name of Christ'—that is practically the form which 'Baptizing into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost' has taken. And this result has been helped by the misuse of the formula, putting 'in the name' for 'into the name.' As Christ is the revealer of the Father, and the giver of the Holy Spirit, the appellation may be accepted; and one who has the name of Christ has thereby the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is only the name thereof that is conferred by Baptism; but when God gives a name He gives the reality along with it. When He gives the name of Christ it is that the reality also may be given—that he who is baptized may become a true disciple. So Baptism becomes the seal of the Covenant through which that is accomplished.

Baptism existed before Christ elevated it into a sacrament, as the elements of the Lord's Supper existed beforehand in the Jewish Passover. The rite had been familiar to the disciples in the baptism of proselytes, and in the baptism of John—in both of which cases it was in a sense the seal of a covenant—and the disciples of Jesus had, probably from the mere force of imitation, administered it in Christ's lifetime. In His farewell Commission, Christ confirms the use of it, and elevates it into a new and sure significance as the seal of the Covenant which He therein establishes. And nowhere in the Bible have we a Covenant of which the terms are so clear and definite. On the one side there is the service required of the Church, to teach the things which Christ commanded; on the other there is the engagement of

Christ, to be with His Church alway, to make her teaching effectual. The Church undertakes to teach, Christ undertakes to give His presence; Baptism is the seal of this Covenant. Every time that Baptism is administered, the Church promises to teach those that are baptized; and Christ meets His Church in the Sacrament and promises to be with her in this work.

The Efficacy of Baptism, it will be seen, depends not on the mere affixing of the seal, but on the observance of the Covenant of which it is the seal: not on the administering of the rite, but on the giving of the teaching, and the blessing of the Spirit which are signified in the rite. The Church has no warrant to expect that those who are baptized will prove true disciples, if she neglects to give them the teaching which she undertakes in Baptism to give. The real efficacy of Baptism is in the pledge it gives of the presence of Christ, and of His giving the Spirit to bless the teaching given. The Church may be unfaithful, and fail to perform her part of the Covenant; but Christ remains faithful: He cannot deny Himself. It must be remembered, however, that something is needful too in those who are baptized. The Church may teach, Christ may give the Holy Spirit; they must yield their wills. That is the prerogative which God leaves to them. If they resist, and refuse to obey the teaching, the Covenant is of no effect for them; they are not disciples.

Who are *the subjects of Baptism*? To answer this in the terms of the Institution, they are those who are to be taught the things which Christ commanded. When the Church undertakes to teach these things, she is required by her Lord to administer to those whom she teaches the ordinance which He appointed. That is alike her pledge that she will do her part, and His that He will bless her in doing so. If she neglects it, she may trust in His grace to bless efforts which she may put forth, but she cannot plead with Him for the fulfilment of His Covenant.

Here we come to controversial ground, on which I do not enter. I have sought merely to give the meaning of the words instituting the Sacrament, which must be the determining element in discussing the subject in the light of other texts.