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THE BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE

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Perhaps no saying or teaching of the Master's has been more often misused than his reply to John the Baptist, to whom Jesus had applied for baptism. At the request John had demurred, professing his unworthiness even to loosen the latchet of the Saviour's shoes. Said Jesus in answer (Matt. 3:15), "Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." While in one sense this was a concession to the physical rite, the true significance of the answer must be found not so much in the actual baptism with water as in the reason Jesus advanced for the observance —namely, "to fulfil all righteousness."

It can be said safely that Christ Jesus never in the slightest meaning or degree, in his teaching or in his practice, departed from the highest ethical standard of Principle. He could never have counseled concession to error as incumbent upon the fulfilling of all righteousness. Our Leader, Mary Baker Eddy, in "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures," puts this ethical standard thus (p. 167): "Only through radical reliance on Truth can scientific healing power be realized."

When Jesus insisted upon the rite of water baptism, wherein did he conform to the standard of radical reliance upon Truth? John the Baptist had proclaimed his own mission and ministry (John 1:23): "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias." And Luke interpreted John's role thus (Luke 3:3): "And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." Mrs. Eddy tells us (Miscellaneous Writings, p. 203), "Metaphysically, baptism serves to rebuke the senses and illustrate Christian Science." The rebuke of Science brings on the baptism of repentance, as well as spiritual regeneration.

The divine demand is that we bring, out of our contrition, to the sacrificial altar of Truth our cherished false beliefs, and there immolate every wrong sense and act. Surely this is the meaning of bringing forth fruits meet for repentance; and the meaning of repentance is literally change of

mind. Such different thinking is no mere alteration of mortal thought from one erroneous concept and act to another, but rather abandonment of wrong thought, desires, and conduct in favor of right ideas and righteous behavior.

To effect righteousness, or right thinking and acting, in one's heart and life one must repent, whether the error be sin or disease, or other departure from the right path. One must come to the conviction where he can say, 'I don't think that way any more,' and demonstrate his repentance through a conformation of his life to that higher sense; for one cannot advance from matter to Spirit in one bound.

Moral purification is the baptism which Jesus suffered to be so now, the ethical standard he taught and practiced prior to his own spiritual baptism of fire, submergence in Spirit. This necessary order in salvation and in spiritual growth, as taught and practiced by John the Baptist and by Jesus the Christ, has its conformation in the teaching of Christian Science that redemption from all error must precede salvation.

Immediately following his baptism by John, the Master entered actively upon his own great fulfillment of all righteousness, healing the sick, saving the sinning, and himself furnishing the supreme example, namely, complete demonstration of Truth in the overcoming of matter and mortality, and rising to the realization of his true selfhood and life in Spirit, God.

Jesus' fulfillment of all righteousness was the example for every sinburdened, bodily sick, and limited human consciousness, for hearts bowed down and bodies broken, and for the self-righteous and self-exalted. His "suffer it to be so now" was not an apology for compromise with error in any of its legion of presentments. Rather was it a ringing call for salvation from all evil, from sin, disease, death, through morals (ethics) and religion (true spiritual Science), healing and uplifting (spiritualizing) the race.

Christ Jesus, and no less the Discoverer and Founder of Christian Science and Leader of the Christian Science movement, consistently taught and as consistently demonstrated unfailing and radical adherence to the Principle and rules of divine Science as applied to humanity. The Saviour in his great compassion for the suffering, from whatsoever cause, assured every individual that the yoke of Christ was easy and the burden light. And Science and Health shows that the easy yoke and light burden of the Christly way are attainable through suffering to be so now only the thoughts and deeds that tend spiritually upward, thus fulfilling all righteousness.

Concessions to unspiritual methods do not make one strong in Truth; yet to be strong in one's stand against error is essential to demonstration of health, normality, and success. Rightly understood, Science and Health makes no concessions to the alleged curative power of matter, but contrariwise warns consistently throughout against recourse to other than spiritual power for the healing of disease, limitation, or other abnormality. Christ Jesus knew the hypocrisy of his critics, who questioned him as to his authority for the healing works he performed. And he parried their query with a question of his own (Matt. 21:25): "The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men?" Their refusal to answer exposed the weakness of their own moral position. John himself had called them a generation of vipers. Upon their evasion of the Master's question, Jesus refused to tell them by what authority he did his mighty works, for they knew already. But his subscription to the material rite indicated his acceptance of the moral as well as of the spiritual requirements for the office of Christ and for Christly discipleship. The baptism of John was indeed of God.

Unnumbered thousands of the world's needy are today bringing their sacrifices of cherished erroneous beliefs to the altar of divine Science, for the remission of sin, sickness, frustration. The giving up of their earthly all they find has full compensation in the acquiring of spiritual light and peace, joy and blessings beyond all human expectation. The baptism of John was demonstrably of God. Science and Health declares (p. 192), "Moral and spiritual might belong to Spirit, who holds the 'wind in His fists;' and this teaching accords with Science and harmony."

Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes: for thou shall break forth on the right hand and on the left.—Isaiah 54:2, 3.

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