

Bishop JC Ryle on Baptism – from Knots Untied

Let me now show the reader the special lessons to which I think attention ought to be directed.

(1) For one thing, I wish to urge on all who study the much-disputed subject of baptism, the importance of aiming at simple views of this sacrament. The dim, hazy, swelling words, which are often used by writers about baptism, have been fruitful sources of strange and unscriptural views of the ordinance. Poets, and hymn-composers, and Romish theologians, have flooded the world with so much high-flown and rhapsodical language on the point, that the minds of many have been thoroughly swamped and confounded. Thousands have imbibed notions about baptism from poetry, without knowing it, for which they can show no warrant in God's Word. Milton's Paradise Lost is the sole parent of many a current view of Satan's agency; and uninspired poetry is the sole parent of many a man's views of baptism in the present day.

Once for all, let me entreat every reader of this paper to hold no doctrine about baptism which is not plainly taught in God's Word. Let him beware of maintaining any theory, however plausible, which cannot be supported by Scripture. In religion, it matters nothing who says a thing, or how beautifully he says it. The only question we ought to ask is this, "Is it written in the Bible? what saith the Lord?"

(2) For another thing, I wish to urge on many of my fellow Churchmen the dangerous tendency of extravagantly high views of the efficacy of baptism. I have no wish to conceal my meaning. I refer to those Churchmen who maintain that grace invariably accompanies baptism, and that all baptized infants are in baptism born again. I ask such persons, in all courtesy and brotherly kindness, to consider seriously the dangerous tendency of their views, and the consequences which logically result from them.

They seem to me, and to many others, to degrade a holy ordinance appointed by Christ into a mere charm, which is to act mechanically, like a medicine acting on the body, without any movement of a man's heart or soul. Surely this is dangerous!

They encourage the notion that it matters nothing in what manner of spirit people bring their children to be baptized. It signifies nothing whether they come with faith, and prayer, and solemn feelings, or whether they come careless, prayerless, godless, and ignorant as heathens! The effect, we are told, is always the same in all cases! In all cases, we are told, the infant is born again the moment it is baptized, although it has no right to baptism at all, except as the child of Christian parents. Surely this is dangerous!

They help forward the perilous and soul-ruining delusion that a man may have grace in his heart, while it cannot be seen in his life. Multitudes of our worshippers have not a spark of religious life or grace about them. And yet we are told that they must all be addressed as regenerate, or possessors of grace, because they have been baptized! Surely this is dangerous!