

THE VOICE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

There is a God—infinite in wisdom, power, knowledge, truth, love, justice, goodness, mercy and benevolence: unchangeable in His purposes, and impartial in His dealings, meeting out righteousness to those who love righteousness, and warning with a Fatherly care all those who are inclined to wander from the same. The fact is also declared that man was created in His image, and to him was given dominion over all below the skies; but man fell from his paradisaical state, and lost his innocence and his power, and became an alien from the fold of God, the slave of sin and Satan, and subject to misery and death, and doomed to eternal woe, unless some ransom could be found, but that ransom has been found, and is a lamb slain from before the foundation of the world. It was this condition of things that led the Son of God from the throne of His glory down to this sin-stained earth, to proclaim himself “the Good Shepherd,” seeking for His lost and wandering sheep. And now kind reader, let me ask, do you not feel that you have strayed away, and have become an alien from the fold of God? Can you not exclaim in the language of the holy writ, “all we like sheep have gone astray?” Do you not realize that you have wandered and are wandering in the desert of sin, where only thorns and thistles grow? Do you not realize that you have been feeding upon husks instead of rich pastures of the Good Shepherd; that you have been drinking at troubled and impure waters, instead of the limpid streams that flow from the fountain of life? Listen to the voice of inspiration: “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” Rom. 3: 23. “There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after good. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” Rom. 3: 11. Can you say truly that this is not your condition? If you feel that it is, listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd: “I am the light of the world, he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” John 8: 12. “I am the way, the truth and the life, and no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” John 14: 6. “I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture.” John 10: 9. Here He is represented as the light of the world, because He is clothed with the revelations of eternal wisdom, to guide the wandering sheep back to the true fold; yet He speaks

not his own words, but the words of His Father that sent Him. He is the way, the truth and the life because He seeks not His own will, but the will of Him that sent Him, and by implicit obedience to that will He has become the perfect embodiment of the same, and it shines forth in every word and deed of His life, and also because He was chosen from before the foundation of the world to be a propitiation for our sins: and “there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.” Acts 4: 12. He is the “door” because He is the “mediator between God and man.” 1 Tim. 2: 5.

Here are two glorious promises, 1st, “*He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*” 2nd, “*By me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture.*” Now, the fact that He requires us to follow Him, is evidence to us that He submitted to all the requirements He has enjoined upon us, “leaving us an example, that we should follow His steps.” 1 Peter 2: 21. Hence, “he that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself also to walk even as He walked.” 1 John 2; 6. Read also John 10: 1, 2. Here He declares, “He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber, but he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.” Here the word door is used as applying to some law or ordinance, as the means of adoption into the sheep-fold, and does not apply to his own person, as it is evident from the fact that He, (the Shepherd) entered in by that door, and to Him the porter openeth. The office of a porter is to open or prepare the way. John the Baptist was the porter here spoken of. “He was the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord.” John 1: 23. We read that this porter was baptizing in the waters of Jordan, when Jesus, in the humility of His soul, presented Himself and humbly requested baptism at his hands: “John forbade Him saying, I have need to be baptised of thee, and comest thou to me?” Mark the answer, reader, and let it inspire thy heart to every duty devolving upon thee: “Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. * * And Jesus, when He was baptised, went up straightway out of the water: and lo, the heavens opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon

Him: and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Mat. 3: 13-17. You need not mistake, Jesus is the Shepherd, John was the porter, baptism was the door which he opened and by which the Shepherd entereth, and "he that climbeth up any other way is a thief and a robber." The same authority declared to Nicodemus that "except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God." John 3: 5. But you will ask why it was necessary for Jesus, who knew no sin, to be baptized? We answer that He who knew no sin was made sin for us, and "the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Isa. 53: 6. He was also sent to be an example for us, and again, it was necessary that He should fulfil all righteousness.

Let us now go back and briefly review the example of the Lord Jesus. It will be evident to all, that in the first place He had implicit confidence in Him who sent Him. 2d. That He avoided every thing that was offensive to God, and injurious to humanity. This the whole tenor of His life declares. 3d. That He yielded implicit obedience to every requirement of His Father, and that this order of baptism was one of the requirements. Now let us compare His conduct with His teachings, and see if they agree: "Verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life." John. 5: 24. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but should have everlasting life." John 3: 16. Paul says: "He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him." Heb 11: 6. From this text we learn that faith in God and in His Son Jesus Christ is the first requirement of the gospel, and this prepares the mind for the reception of, and obedience to every other requirement, for how could they be sensible of sin against a being of whose existence and character they had no idea, and whose laws they had never heard? For this purpose the gospel of the kingdom was preached, that all might learn that they had sinned, and be led to repent of the same; hence Jesus says: "I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." Luke 5: 32. "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish." Luke 13: 3. He also sent His disciples to preach the gospel: and upon the ever memorable day of Pentecost, when three

thousand were pricked in their hearts, because of their faith in Peter's words, they cried out "men and brethren, what shall we do?" The inspired apostle immediately commanded them to repent, and be baptized for the remission of sins. The necessity for repentance is enforced on almost every page of holy writ; and here let me tell you what repentance is. It is implied in the words "cease to do evil and learn to do well," and this is its real import, and the only repentance which is not to be repented of. Godly sorrow, when the mind is truly convicted of sin, worketh repentance, but is not repentance of itself, it is only the good work begun, the completion of it is the entire forsaking of evil of every name. "The soul that sinneth it shall die." "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life." Rom. 6: 23. This is the language of inspiration, the voice of the Good Shepherd. Will you hear it and obey, or will you pass on and be punished? It is written, "the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." Ps. 9: 17. So far we have listened for the voice of the Good Shepherd; will you follow Him? Where else can you go? He only hath the words of eternal life. See John 6: 68. If you wish to follow Him the path is onward; shrink not, although He has told you the way is strait and beset with snares: the prize is at the end of the race, and can be obtained by even the weakest that will trust in Him. Hitherto we have found His precepts and His practices agree. We have seen that He was buried in Jordan's tide, and that there was a glorious acknowledgment and ratification by high heaven to the deed. Now let us see if He teaches the same obedience to us, and if He does, who shall say that it is a thing of no importance? "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." John 3: 5. Is there a more emphatic declaration in holy writ? Will you cavil with Him who spake as never man spake? Will you place the contradictory statements of the theologians of the day against those of the Son of God? Reader, "let God be true though every man be found a liar." Listen to the commission He gave to His disciples after He had burst the barriers of the tomb: "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Mark 16: 15, 16. Here you find His mind is

not changed from what it was in His mortal life, the same law is in force, and is as much binding upon man after, as before His crucifixion. Let us now follow the teachings of His inspired apostles. We find them in an upper room waiting to receive "the promise of the Father." They realize the blessing, and under its divine influence commence their mission. three thousand souls are convinced that that same Jesus who had been crucified was both Lord and Christ, and they cry out in the agony of their souls, "men and brethren, what shall we do?" What an all important question! It is one of life and death. The most momentous and eternal consequences hang upon the answer. They now listen with breathless silence and a fearful suspense. It is but for a moment. The answer is ready. Surely it cannot be trivial in its nature. It must be equal to the emergency. It will be no phantom of the brain. Men inspired of God cannot trifle with the souls of men. They will not dare to give a mere opinion, or speak of things that are non-essential. No, it will be the word of God that is firm as the everlasting hills, and unchanging as God himself. Hear it as it sinks deep into the hearts of that vast concourse of anxious souls: "Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." Acts 2: 38. Is not that enough to satisfy the most wavering, as to what is essential to salvation? Can men who profess to believe the Bible require more? Have you found, or can you find, a single sentence that repeals that law? Are not repentance and baptism joined together? Is not one as emphatically declared as the other? Will you dare to separate that which God has joined together? Will you tell me that you believe in God, and His Son, but cannot believe in the importance of baptism? Do you deny that it is His word? What does your faith amount to, if it only recognizes God, and at the same time disputes His word? Unless your faith lays hold of all the commands and promises of God it is worse than vanity, and can never benefit you in time or eternity. The baptism here spoken of is by immersion. Jesus compared it to a birth: "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." John 3: 5. Paul speaks of it as a burial, and again as being planted: "therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up

from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection." Rom. 6: 4, 5. "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through faith in the operation of God, who hath raised him the dead." Col. 2: 12. Each of these illustrations imply immersion, and there is no shadow of evidence of any other order of baptism.

We will now show to you, gentle reader, another of the glorious principles of the gospel. By reading John 14, 15 and 16 c., you will find that the Good Shepherd promises to His sheep another Comforter, that should guide them into all truth, and take of the things of the Father and show them unto them, &c. In Mark 16 c. He renewed that promise, and said that "these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." Paul, speaking of these gifts, in 1 Cor. xii., shews them to be the operations of the Spirit, and shews that they were enjoyed by the saints. And Peter declared on the day of Pentecost, in connection with baptism for the remission of sins, "And ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Acts 2: 38, 39. These scriptures show that this promise was not limited to any particular class of men or age of the world; but that the promise extended to all that would obey the gospel and follow the Good Shepherd. Now let us ascertain if there is any particular order to be observed in order to receive this blessing. We have shown that the means of preparation for this blessing are faith, repentance, and baptism for the remission of sins. We understand that the scriptures were written for our learning, and are profitable for doctrine, etc., (2 Tim. 3: 16,) and by them we learn the ordinance appointed of God, whereby this blessing is conferred. In Acts 8 c. we read that Philip, in Samaria, preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, and many received the word and were baptized, and "when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John; who when they were come down prayed

for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost. * * * Then laid they their hands on them and they received the Holy Ghost." In Acts 19 c. we read of twelve persons being baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus: "And when Paul laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them, and they spake with tongues and prophesied."

Reader, God is the lawgiver ^{to} His people, and no man has a right to introduce any order into His church that he has not received from Him, and if he does so he renders himself liable to Paul's anathema, and also to the displeasure of the Almighty. Think you those holy apostles would do this? And would the Eternal sanction such innovation by the seal of His Spirit if they did? We read of a certain man who was struck dead for putting forth his hand to touch the ark; when it was only the prerogative of another. And will He be less careful about unlawful interference in His kingdom? The fact that the Holy Ghost was given by this ordinance of laying on of hands, is evidence to us that it was the order of God, and when we consider the position and character of the men who administered that ordinance, we can no longer doubt its divine origin; but if it was possible for a doubt still to linger in our bosoms, it is dispelled by the voice of inspiration in Heb. 6 c., where Paul enumerates the principles of the doctrine of Christ, and the laying on of hands is incorporated with them as one of the principles of that doctrine. Read for yourselves, and bow to the Majesty on high; so shall you realize the blessings of obedience, that shall give a knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus, and your mind shall be prepared to contemplate the doctrine of the resurrection from the dead, and of eternal judgment, and secure to yourself a part in the first and glorious resurrection, and become like the Good Shepherd, and reign with Him a thousand years on earth, (see Rev. 20 c.) and after that enjoy the fulness of the celestial glory of God, where sin and sorrow can never come. See Rev. 21, 22 c. Yes, it is by the power of that Holy Spirit that you must be prepared to stand against the fiery darts of the wicked, and be enabled to detect the subtle wiles of Satan, and overcome his power. It is a very important part of the armor of God, which He has given to His people, (see Phil. 6 : 11, 13,) "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the

knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive." Eph. 4 : 12-14.

Reader, the foregoing is the voice of the Good Shepherd unto you. Do you hear it? Do you know that voice? Are you willing? Are you determined to follow Him? He will lead you by the side of pure and still waters, and cause you to feed in the green pastures of eternal life. He gave His life for you; yes, He died that you might live; He suffered hunger and thirst that you might be filled. Shall He invite in vain? Shall He have shed His blood for naught? Or will you accept the golden opportunity while it is yet called to-day? What doth hinder? Do you doubt the word of the Lord? It will endure forever—not one of His promises shall fail. Do you say you can inherit the blessings without submitting to the conditions prescribed? The Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not his gospel.

"If any man hear my words and believe not, I judge him not, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him. The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." John 12 : 47, 48. This then is the word of the Lord unto all mankind: believe in God and in His Son Jesus Christ, repent of your sins in deed and in truth, and be baptized in water (as Jesus the Good Shepherd was) for the remission of sins, and have hands laid upon you by those whom God has called and sent forth in these last days, for the reception of the gift of the Holy Ghost, and walk by the light of the same, adding "to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that you shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 1 : 5-8. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has set you the example, and has gone before to lead you "He shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."