

**OBSERVATIONS ON BAPTISM:  
BEING A REPLY TO A LETTER  
ON THAT SUBJECT, ADDRESSED  
TO THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649260416

Observations on Baptism: Being a Reply to a Letter on that Subject, Addressed to the Society of friends by Enoch Lewis

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Cover @ 2017

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**ENOCH LEWIS**

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Lewis. Observations on Baptism. 1842

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BY ENOCH LEWIS.

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Philadelphia:

PRINTED BY JOSEPH BAKESTRAW,  
No. 50, North Fourth Street.

1842.

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## OBSERVATIONS ON BAPTISM.

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A pamphlet has lately come into my hands, entitled, "Baptism, an affectionate letter to the Society of Friends, by one who knows and loves many of its members;" the professed object of which is, to correct some of the errors which he alledges have been committed by the writer of an essay on baptism, published in Philadelphia, by the Tract Association of Friends.

As this author professes to write in the spirit of love, and for the purpose of correcting the errors of a preceding writer, it is to be hoped he will receive in the spirit of candour and charity, an attempt equally friendly, to rectify some of the misapprehensions into which *he* appears to have fallen.

He opens his discussion with a request that his readers, or the Society of Friends, will correct a *sad misapprehension*, into which, he thinks, the writer of the Tract has fallen. To show what this misapprehension is, he quotes from the Tract, a declaration, "that Christian baptism is quite another thing from a mere formal ceremony, administered in Christ's name; that this latter is easy to the flesh, &c.,



that it is not water baptism, nor any kind of rituals whatever, that renders any man a Christian in our Saviour's account; but obedience to the operation of his Holy Spirit;" and asks whether we can be ignorant, that in these views we do not differ from Christians, who yet feel bound to retain the ordinances. If then our opinions on these points, are the same as those held by the Society to which this writer belongs, what misapprehension is there to correct? But, he says, "it is intimated in the Tract, that the Society of Friends differ from other religious denominations, in regarding an outward rite, alone and by itself, useless; that they are singular in maintaining the necessity of a baptism of the heart, by the power of the Holy Ghost; that they hold a peculiar opinion, in believing that mortification of the corrupt affections, is essential to all who would bear the name of Christ." And this, he tells us, is a *miserable error*: to prove which, a passage is cited from the Episcopal office of Baptism. "Baptism representeth unto us our profession, which is to follow the example of our Saviour Christ, and to be made like unto him, that as he died and rose again for us, so should we who are baptised, die from sin and rise again unto righteousness, continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue, and godliness of living." He then asks, is this an easy thing to the flesh?

Here, I apprehend, are more misapprehensions than one.

In the first place, I can find no intimation in the Tract that the doctrine which it advocates, is peculiar to the Society of Friends. The design of the

writer evidently was to show what the true Christian baptism is, and what it is not. In this, he has, I think, been successful; though the brevity which he has observed, has probably in some instances, prevented him from presenting the arguments to their greatest advantage.

In the next place, the writer of the Letter appears to confound two things, which are essentially different; and which the author of the Tract, if not his own quotation from the office of baptism, has clearly distinguished; viz. the formal ceremony, and the baptism of the spirit; the baptism with water, and the thing represented by it. The writer of the Tract declares, that submission to the mere formal ceremony, is easy to the flesh. Is not that declaration true? And what is the error which we are requested to rectify.

The author of the Letter gives us to understand, that the Society of which he is a member, do not consider the rite of water baptism as a *substitute* for the baptism of the spirit; but receive it "only as a sign of an inward and spiritual grace." Admit that it is *only a sign* of an inward and spiritual grace, and there is little left for controversy. The Society of Friends have always admitted, that the baptism of John, no less than the divers washings prescribed by the Mosaic law, was a type of the purification of heart, which is produced by the effectual baptism of the Holy Spirit. We say it was a type, and only a type, commanded under the typical and preparatory dispensation. But as we do not find that our Lord ever commanded his disciples to use it, we think it constitutes no part of the Christian religion.

But call water baptism, as now administered, a sign of an inward and spiritual grace, and what do we mean by the expression? It is not a visible sign to any but those who are present where it is administered. If it is a sign of an inward grace, does it denote that the grace is necessarily present? If a person may assume this sign and yet live an irreligious life, that circumstance indicates that it may be a false sign. Common honesty requires, that a sign should not be hung out or assumed, unless the thing denoted by it, is present. We are informed, that the grace of God which bringeth salvation, hath appeared unto all men; not to all who are baptized with water; teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present world.\* Are we to believe, that this grace is dependent upon water baptism? Or does that baptism denote, that the subjects of it have been taught by divine grace to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live a sober, righteous and godly life? If they have, it was the grace of God, and not the sign, that taught them.

What then has the sign to do with it? The citation from the Episcopal office of baptism, appears to be intended to prove, that they acknowledge the necessity of purification of heart, the mortification of our corrupt affections, and a life of virtue and godliness. That is very well. But we are still left to inquire, what effect baptism with water can possibly have in producing this purification and godliness. All the importance appears to belong to the thing signified, and not to the sign. If the outward sign may be as-

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\* Titus ii. 11, 12.