

A Case for Closed Communion

Taken from "Baptist Pamphlets", 1880

In surveying this entire question as it lies between Baptists and Pedobaptists, I am obliged to come to the conclusion, that the principal difference between them in this matter is, that the Baptists adhere to the Bible and their creed, while the Pedobaptists discard both in this instance for the sake of open communion.

I acknowledge that this assertion seems severe, but only a glance at the grounds upon which it is founded, will show that such a conclusion is drawn from facts, as they appear in the premises.

A pious Scotchman, a few years ago, after enumerating all the different sects in Scotland, remarks, "Each of these sects is closed communion in every sense of the word. They never partake of the Lord's Supper together; they all say, if we have reason to divide into different sects we cannot unite in the Lord's Supper, which is the most essential act of church fellowship."

The same may be said of the churches of England in the seventeenth century, in the days of Baxter, Charnock, Palmer, Saunders, Longly, Doolittle, Henry, Earl., etc.

And what shall we say of our own New England Pedobaptist churches, who, in 1636, by force of arms, banished Roger Williams from Salem, Mass., for his principles; in 1639 fined the leading men who formed a little Baptist interest in Weymouth from 20s. to £20 each for the same thing, and threatened them with perpetual banishment if they persisted. Did it look like open communion in 1644, when they passed a law in Boston to banish all who openly condemned or opposed infant baptism? In 1643 seven men were tried, convicted, condemned, sent to prison, and put in irons in the city of Boston, and in 1644 were banished by order of the general court, and forbidden to return under the penalty of suffering death; and all this for the dreadful crime of being Baptists. In 1644, a poor man by the name of Painter, in Hingham, near Boston, was condemned, tied up and whipped, and for what? because he turned Baptist and refused to have his child sprinkled. In 1651, three Baptist clergymen in Lynn, a few miles east of Boston, were arrested while one was preaching on Lord's day, and sent to prison in Boston, where they lay two weeks, and were fined, one £30, one £20, and one £5, and sentenced to be publicly whipped if they refused to pay. How one got out, history informs us not; but of the other two we are informed that the fine of one was paid and that the other, Mr. Holmes, was cruelly whipped. Two men who were standing by, and witnessing this bloody scene, showed some signs of sympathy, which led the Pedobaptists to suspect them of being Baptists, and they were accordingly arrested, and each sentenced to pay 40s. and to be publicly whipped. The poor Baptists, after enduring the most relentless persecution, succeeded in building a church in Boston. But the Pedobaptists shut it up in 1680, and posted the following note upon the door: "All persons are to take notice, that by order of the COURT, the doors of this house are shut up; and that they are inhibited to hold any meeting, or too open the doors thereof without license from authority, till the GENERAL COURT take further order, as they will answer the contrary at their peril.
" Dated at Boston, 8th March, 1680. "EDWARD RAWSON, Secretary."

Between the years 1727 and 1733, there were twenty-eight Baptists, two Quakers, and two Episcopalians imprisoned at Bristol, Mass., (now R. I.) for Congregationalist ministers' tax. In 1770, about four hundred acres of land, belonging to the members of the Baptist church in Ashfield, were sold at auction by order of the Court, to pay the Congregational minister tax. "Nay, they sold their dead; for they sold their graveyard. The orthodox minister was one of the purchasers." (See Minutes of the Philadelphia Association, page 116.)

In 1658, the court of New Haven, Conn., made a law prohibiting all conversation of the common people with any of those heretics, such as Quakers, Baptists, etc., and all persons from giving them any entertainment on the penalty of X5.

It is indeed painful to refer to such historical facts; but I do it that we may be able to test the practical influence of the doctrine which we are defending. We are charged with being bigoted and narrow, and "confined in our Christian charities, and that all this grows out of our closed communion. But what are the facts? What do the facts which I have just noted say in behalf of the Pedobaptists of America in the seventeenth, and, I might have added, the eighteenth century also. Are we not under the painful necessity of not only charging them with bigotry, but, in too many instances, with intolerance? Religious intolerance never exists without bigotry, and bigotry never exists without fostering a spirit which would lead to the same unhappy results. Any system of religion, therefore, which in its practical influence would lead us to persecute those who are of a different opinion with ourselves, or would preclude Christian fellowship with those who are right in the fundamentals of religion, and have passed from death unto life, and become the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ, just because they differ from us in some being, not absolutely necessary to salvation, must be wrong, radically wrong. Such is the connection between cause and effect, that we may always look for the latter to follow the former so far as the cause is permitted to operate unobstructed by different circumstances.

If restricted communion have a tendency to make us bigoted and uncharitable toward Christians who differ from us in opinion, then we might look for religious intolerance and persecution in some form, either in spirit or practice, to mark the history of the Baptist denomination. But you may trace the history of the denomination from the days of John the Baptist to the present time, and you will find that all the blood that has ever been shed on account of Baptists, has been shed by the cruelty of their persecutors, and flowed from the veins of Baptists themselves. Whatever imperfections have marked their history, whatever zeal untempered by knowledge, or whatever enthusiasm may have seized their ranks, at any period, they cannot be charged by their most virulent enemies with ever having been a persecuting people.

It is true, great moral tenacity has marked their history; which, while it has also marked their integrity, has nevertheless brought down upon them severe, and, at times, unmitigated persecutions from other Christian denominations. But this tenacity by which they have been distinguished, and for which they have suffered so much calumny and violent persecution, has been for the Bible, the pure and unaltered Word of God in all it communicates for the faith and practice of mankind; and that, too, irrespective of popular opinions and influence. They contend for that liberty which allows every man to read, think, and decide for himself as to the duties and privileges set forth in God's revelation to the world. They contend that we should both do and teach the commandments of Christ as Christ himself hath said, and not as man says. They

contend that the duties and ordinances of the gospel are to be observed as Christ, the great Head of the Church has directed, and not as the Councils of the Church may decree. In short, they contend that conscience is no safe guide in any of these things, only as it is enlightened by the Word and Spirit of God. And all they ask of the whole Pedobaptist world, is for them to follow their example in this particular, be willing to take God's Holy Word as it may be literally interpreted, and as the best authorities do construe its sacred words, and they are certain that it would not be long before the whole evangelical church would say, we have " one Lord, one faith, one Baptism."

One other thing which is worthy of praise must be allowed us, and that is CONSISTENCY. We neither believe in, nor will we give countenance to, infant sprinkling; nor allow sprinkling or pouring to be Christian baptism; nor will we admit that any unbaptized person has a right to commune. Here we stand unflinchingly, and are determined not to move or swerve a hair's breadth. If we should, we would be inconsistent. I might say, if we should depart from any of these landmarks we would cease to be Baptists.

If the same consistency marked the Pedobaptists with regard to the ordinances of Christ, there would be hope of ultimately ending this controversy. It is a fact which all our Pedobaptist ministers and many of the people know, that in their churches there are multitudes who, but for certain maneuverings on their part, would have been Baptists. And even now a very little thing would so far wake up this subject in their minds, as to make them feel very uncomfortable in their connection with Pedobaptist churches.

Let the Pedobaptist churches enforce their respective disciplines, and require their members to invariably sanction infant baptism, and there would be such a fire kindled among them that nothing but immersion would quench it. They would drive their members off to Baptist churches by hundreds if not by thousands. They dare not do this thing; but I ask, are they consistent for not doing it?

[Return to Baptist Doctrine](#)