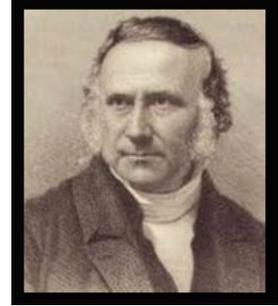


## *A Strange Snare*



A young man about nineteen years of age, a member of my congregation, was a hopeful convert to Christ, at the time of a general revival of religion. I felt a more than common interest in him, on account of my intimacy with his family, his own intelligence and education, and my hope that he would become a minister of the gospel. I had not so much personal acquaintance with him, as with most of those, who had been led to seek the Lord. He was very retiring, and it was not easy to know so much of him, as I desired. But I had often conversed with him about his hope in Christ, and knew him well enough to know, that there was something a little peculiar about his turn of mind, or way of thinking. But I saw nothing in him, that led me to doubt his piety. He was very attentive to his religious duties, and to me he appeared humble and devoted. I had often conversed with him about the evidences of his faith; and just before our season of communion, he came to converse with me alone, in respect to his uniting with the church. He deemed that to be his duty.

After considerable conversation on the evidences of his piety, and the nature and design of divine ordinances; he said to me rather suddenly, and as if he had just thought of it:—

“My opinion is that immersion is the right way of baptism.”

“Indeed,” said I. “What makes you think so?”

“Christ was immersed,” said he.

“I do not believe he was,” said I. “There is not an item of proof that he was. There are strong reasons for believing the contrary. But, suppose he was immersed. So he was crucified.—But why was he baptized?”

“I don’t know,” said he; “for an example to us, I suppose.”

“What makes you suppose so?”

“Why—why—I thought so,” said he, hesitatingly.

“And did you think he was crucified for an example to us?”

“Oh, no!”

“Why not? If his baptism was an example for us to follow, why not his crucifixion also?”

“I don’t know. I never thought of that.”

“Does the Bible teach you that Christ’s baptism was an example for us to follow, any more than his crucifixion, or his fasting forty days?”

“I never thought of that,” said he.

“Was Christ baptized for the same reason that his followers are to be baptized? or was he baptized as an official induction into the priestly office, as Aaron and his sons, and the Levites were ordered to be sprinkled with water?”

“I don’t know,” said he. “What does our baptism mean?” said I.

“It is a sign of the washing away of sin,” said he.

“Was Christ a sinner?”

“Oh, no!”

“Why, then, was such a sign applied to him?”

“Indeed I cannot tell. I never thought of it.”

“Was Christ’s baptism Christian baptism? Was the Christian dispensation established at that time?”

“I cannot answer.”

“Had the Jewish dispensation come to an end?”

“I cannot answer that.”

“Was Christ baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost?”

“I never thought of that.”

I then said to him, that I had no objections to make against immersion, no fault to find with those who practiced it, and no objections to his uniting with that excellent Christian denomination. But it was manifest, that he had not studied the subject very much; and it would be best for him to take time and examine it well, before he united with any church. He would then be better satisfied with himself, than if he acted hastily.

He cordially assented to this, and afterwards came to me repeatedly, naming some passages of the Bible, which he thought favored immersion; and as often as he came, I gave him my views upon them; which he confessed appeared to him just and fair. He could find no fault with them. In this way, we examined all the passages of the scriptures, which he thought related to the subject. He said he could find no more; and could not disprove or dispute the explanations I had given.

I then presented the passages and the arguments on the other side of the question; telling him to detect any error into which I might fall, and that I was willing to be a Baptist myself, if the Bible would make me so. But he did not pretend, that anything I said was inconclusive.

Some months had passed, since he began to study the subject and come to me with his texts on baptism, when he said to me one day:—

“What objections have you to immersion?”

“None at all,” said I. “In my opinion immersion is a baptism acceptable to God, if those who practice it are conscientious; but I do not believe it is the only acceptable baptism.”

Said he, “Would you be willing to baptize any one by immersion?”

“Yes; three things being out of the way, I should. First, if there was no Baptist church in the place, that the individual could attend. Second, if he had not been baptized in infancy. Third, if I thought he were truly conscientious in the matter, and were not making too much of that ordinance, that is, placing an undue reliance upon it.”

“Would you be willing to immerse me?”

“Yes; on these conditions.”

“Well,” says he, “I have never been baptized, and there is no Baptist church here for me to attend. These are two of the conditions.”

“But,” said I, “do you think immersion needful, when you cannot, as you confess, bring a single passage of the Bible to prove it; and cannot answer one of my arguments and proofs to the contrary? You will have hard work to convince me of your conscientiousness and sincerity, if you are not going to be governed by a fair interpretation of the scriptures. A believer must have a Bible conscience. And if anyone talks to me about conscience in any religious matter, and leaves his Bible behind him; I shall be very apt to think his conscience needs a baptizing with the Holy Spirit, before I will baptize him.”

“I do mean to be conscientious,” says he.

“According to the Bible?”

“Certainly,” said he, “that is the only rule.”

“Very well; go to work. You have to convince me of your piety and of your conscientious belief in immersion, as being taught in the Bible; and when you have done so, I will immerse you, if you desire it. But if you become a Baptist, I advise you to join the Baptist church, not ours.”

“I could not do that,” said he. “They reject infant baptism, and hold to close communion; and I do not agree with them.”

After this he often called upon me; and finally he did convince me, that he was sincere and conscientious about immersion. He confessed he could not show, that immersion was the Bible mode of baptism; and could not pretend, that I had misinterpreted a single text in defending my practice. But after all, he said it did appear to him, that immersion

was right; he should be better satisfied that he had done his duty, if he were immersed; and begged me to immerse him.

“Not yet,” said I. “A few questions first. What does baptism mean?”

He replied: “Just what you have often explained it—a sign and seal of the covenant of Christ, a representation of cleansing from the pollutions of sin by the Holy Spirit.”

“Well; in your opinion, is it essential on what day of the month or of the week it is done?”

“No. The New Testament does not limit us to any particular day.”

“In your opinion, is it any matter what o’clock it is, when one is baptized?”

“Why, no!”

“In your opinion is it any matter how many ministers are present, when baptism is administered?”

“Why, no!”

“Well, then; in your opinion, is it any matter how many other people are present? If a minister and the person to be baptized are alone, like Philip and the Eunuch, would that be good baptism?”

“Certainly; I think so.”

“Very well. Put on your hat. Let us go down to the river, and I will baptize you now. (He hesitated.) “Come, it is a fine, warm day nobody

will see us—I never will tell of it—it shall remain a perfect secret—come, let us go.” (I had risen, put on my hat, and opened the door.)

“What do you hesitate for? Come on.”

“What! now?” said he, (sitting still.)

“Yes; now. I want your conscience to be satisfied; and we have spent months enough studying this matter. Come on. Let us go to the river.”

“What! all alone?”

“Yes; like Philip and the Eunuch. You said it was no matter whether anybody was present or not.”

He seemed confounded. But he would not go. I urged him. I appealed to his conscience, which demanded immersion. I exhorted him, not to violate his conscience—neglect his duty—and destroy his peace of mind. But I could not start him. There he stood, mute, confused, and ashamed. I urged him to tell why he would not go; but he gave no answer. The more I insisted, the more he seemed resolved not to be baptized.

After spending half an hour in this way, I said to him:—

“You have lost my confidence entirely! A little while ago, I believed you sincere; but I do not believe it now. If you were sincere, actuated by conscience, by a sense of duty, as you, pretend; you would not hesitate to go with me and be baptized. But I cannot baptize you now by immersion, or in any other mode. I have lost my confidence in you. Have patience a moment; and I will lift the veil that hides your heart, and give you a little glimpse of what lies within. You thought it would be a fine thing to be immersed, to have the credit of an independent mind;—or perhaps, you were tickled with the idea, that I and all the people should parade away

down to the water on Sunday, yourself the hero of the scene, to be talked about among us. Such a baptism would make a good deal of noise here, and you liked it in your vanity.—That is your heart. You may study it at your leisure. But never talk to me about conscience again, while under the influence of such a heart.—You may go. I have no more to say to you.”

He left me, seeming to feel, that he had escaped out of the paw of the lion. It was not three months after this, before I heard of his extravagant levity, and his sneers at religion. He became apparently very hardened; and in this course of life he continued for months.

But God did not leave him at peace in his sin. He was arrested in his career; and finally became hopefully a convert to Christ. He came to me, to tell me his altered feelings. And finally, when he was examined for admission into the church; he told me he was fully convinced of the truth of what I had said to him about his heart, at the time when he wanted to be immersed. He said he felt ashamed to own it, but it was true, that his desire for immersion arose very much from pride and vanity, and a desire to be popular. If he should be immersed, he would be unlike others; and he was then pleased with the idea, that people would talk about him with wonder, and think him something uncommon in penetration and independence. But he hoped he had repented deeply and sincerely of all this; and now he did not wish to be immersed.

He united with the church. I baptized him, but not by immersion. He still lives a reputable Christian, after twenty years of trial.

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The snares of the devil are very numerous. Perhaps none of them are more common or more dangerous, than those which are addressed to pride and vanity. Young persons especially are exposed to these. When they begin to be attentive to religion or entertain hope in Christ; if their pride becomes connected with religion or religious things, they are greatly exposed to take the gratification of their pride for the comforts of piety. A

passion for popularity, the desire to be noticed, and known, and talked about, has led many a sinner into strange delusion. Spiritual pride is the worst of all pride, if it is not the worst snare of the devil. The heart is peculiarly deceitful just on this thing, pride.