

Village Sermons on the Baptismal Service  
by John Keble

## SERMON XVII.

November 4, 1849.

ACTS viii. 36, 37.

“The Eunuch said, see here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptised? and Philip said. If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest”

THE first part of your baptismal vow or Covenant is, we saw last Sunday, to renounce what God hates; because we cannot be His own, His servants and children, as long as we are in league with His enemy. Therefore we turn at first as it were towards the West, the land of darkness, and say to Satan, the prince of darkness, “get thee from me, with all that take thy part, whether they are openly in the world around us, or inwardly in our own wicked hearts.” And then we go on in a manner to turn the directly contrary way towards the East, the region of light, the side on which the Day-Spring from on high hath visited us. Whether we do so with our bodies or no, we assuredly turn towards the East with our souls, when we make answer about believing. We make it of course, i. e. the godfathers and godmothers make it, in the child’s name; as the promise before was made. Before, it was said, “Dost thou in the name of this child, renounce the devil and all his works;” now it is said, “Dost thou believe in God” and the rest. You see plainly that we are still to understand it, as it was before expressed. The Faith is accepted in the child’s name, as the world, the flesh, and the devil had been renounced in his name. And he is bound to it; the child from that moment is bound to be a sincere, constant, complete believer, in things whereof for the present it seems as though he could not know anything. He is bound to believe what God teaches; all of it; all the days of his life; and that, most seriously. You heard the engagement just now; you heard when the Priest asked the sponsors,

“Dost thou believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth?

“And in Jesus Christ his only-begotten Son our Lord? And that he was conceived by the Holy Ghost; born of the Virgin Mary; that he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; that he went down into hell, and also did rise again the third day; that he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; and from thence shall come again at the end of the world, to judge the quick and the dead?

“And dost thou believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy Catholic Church; the Communion of Saints; the Remission of sins; the Resurrection of the flesh; and everlasting life after death?” And you heard the Sponsors make answer, “all this I stedfastly believe.” There were three of them at least, and yet they said, *I*, not *I*. Why was that? Because they were speaking altogether in the child’s name. They were speaking, not for themselves, but for that little one.

And though that little one cannot as yet have any understanding of what they said, yet he is bound by it and will be so all his life long. That you know very well. You know that he will be called to a strict account, as to how he has kept that engagement. He cannot be as if he had never been so near God. You feel and are sure of it concerning that little child, concerning each child that is brought here to be baptized. Can you help

reflecting, that you are no less sure of it as concerns your own self also? For over each one of us also, when we were first brought to Church, were the same holy words rehearsed. *We* too, in our sureties, had the same question put to us concerning the Creed, “Dost thou believe” &c. and we, by the same sureties, made answer and said, “All this I stedfastly believe.” We are in covenant then to believe all this, and if we do not really believe it, we have broken the covenant; and what will become of us, if we die in that condition?

Wherefore the very least we can do, in order not to slight this covenant, is to consider it very often over, and see how far we are going on stedfastly in it. The covenant binds us, you see, to believe something. What is believing? We all have a notion that we believe; we should all be angry to have it made out that we were unbelievers. But can all of us be truly and really said to believe? Nay, consider, as I said, What is believing? It is receiving something, which God Almighty tells us or teaches us, not in our eyes or ears only, but in our minds; and not in our minds only, but in our hearts. I will try and shew you what I mean. There are little boys and girls here, aye and grown people too, who can say the Belief, every word of it, who could read it quite exactly out of a book, and would do so presently, if yon asked them; and yet they cannot well be said to *believe*, because, with or without their own fault, they know not the meaning of what they speak; they only say it over, like parrots; they are too young or too dull to attend, or they will not take the trouble to do so. Now of these it may be said, they believe with their eyes ears and tongues, but they do not believe with their minds, much less with their hearts. Others again do believe with their minds, i. e. they not only say or mark the words of the Creed, but they really attend to its meaning, and being perhaps quick of understanding, they see how it all comes out of the Bible. So far as it is a lesson to be read, thought over, and answered about, they have learnt it well; they receive it with their minds and understandings. But is this Christian believing? is this true Faith? No; for they do not yet receive it with their hearts. What is receiving it with their hearts? You will know this better, if we stop for a moment to consider what sort of things we, as Christians, are to believe, and why it is so needful we should believe. They are the great things out of sight; What and Who God is, and the wonderful course of His doings towards us sinful children of men. And it is quite necessary we should know and receive them, in order to overcome our enemies, which are also the enemies of God. Those enemies we have just renounced; we have promised to have nothing to do with them, to be altogether on God’s side; knowing that to be against God is certain ruin. But they are not easy to renounce; they are all three close at hand, and one of them, the flesh, is even within us, we carry it about with us wherever we go; our three enemies are close at hand; the false goods wherewith they would tempt us are full in our sight, and seem often within our reach, and we are naturally very weak and frail. Therefore the gracious Lover of our souls, earnestly desiring that we may never perish, has provided us, in His holy Book and in the Creeds which are taken out of it, with the knowledge of a world out of sight, and of wonders unspeakable wrought for us in that world, on which we may set our hearts, and carrying the remembrance of them everywhere about with us, may be able to overcome God’s enemies, near and powerful as they are, and to keep the Commandments, though contrary to flesh and blood. Thus, Faith comes second in our baptismal vow; for it is receiving God, and the things which God hath done, into our hearts, clinging to the thought of them, having them ever before us, and by their mighty presence and power driving away

the devil, overcoming the world and the flesh, and really keeping the Commandments both in will and deed. Believing what God teaches is the only way to have power and will to renounce what He hates and to do what He commands.

Observe, it is said, *constantly* believe and *stedfastly*, “All this I *stedfastly* believe.” Our faith must not come and go, according as the fancy takes us, now in the heart and now out of it; but it must stay and abide with us day and night. This is meant when it is said, “Do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus,” and “whether ye eat or drink or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”<sup>1</sup> Since we cannot for one moment be safe without our Lord’s blessed Presence, since the world the flesh and the devil are always at hand to do us harm, therefore we had need have Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith, like a shield ready to turn every way, to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. Therefore God’s Saints and those who have learned of them have been used to begin every serious work in the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost; in that Name to rise up from their beds, in that Name to kneel down to their Prayers, in that Name to make all solemn gifts and engagements; as a token that, wherever they go, they carry with them by Faith that Holy Trinity into which they were baptized, as a shield against all enemies, visible and invisible. They do not only believe while they are saying the Creed or thinking it over, but at all times, whatever they are about. When temptation comes, it finds them believing that Christ will judge the quick and the dead; and that faith enables them to resist it. When pride or malice would find room in their souls, there is none; for their souls are filled with faith in God made Man, and crucified for His enemies. When a thought would come over them, I am so very weak and frail; surely I shall be forgiven if I do for once give way to this strong temptation; Faith says to them in the depth of their conscience, “you believe in God the Holy Ghost, you know that He dwells in you; greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world;” and so they put away the bad thought. This is constant and stedfast Faith, the Faith whereby good Christians shall be finally justified, the Faith by which people *walk* on the way towards Heaven, and do not only *gaze* on it, and *wish* they were in it. And it is of this faith, I suppose, that so great things are spoken in Holy Scripture. The faith of the heart, not of the mind, much less of the tongue only, is what we promised in Baptism.

As for example; when St. Philip the Deacon met that Eunuch on the road, as he was sitting in his chariot, and reading the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, and when the Saint, beginning at that Scripture, had preached unto him Jesus, and, on their coming to some water, the Eunuch said, “What doth hinder me to be baptized?” St. Philip’s answer was, “If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.” He was not simply to believe, but to believe with all his heart. When St. Paul on his conversion was invited to “arise and be baptized, and wash away his sins, calling on the Name of the Lord,” it was that he not only believed in Christ, but so believed in Him, as to cry out heartily, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” When the prison doors at Philippi flew open at midnight, God having sent a great earthquake to deliver His servants Paul and Silas, and the keeper of the prison, moved to repentance, fell down before the two Saints, and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” St. Paul’s answer was, Believe; “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”<sup>2</sup> Did St. Paul mean that the jailor should merely agree in his mind to the Gospel which he was preaching; that he should say as so many do, “yes, it

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:31

<sup>2</sup> Acts 16:31, Romans 10:9,

is all very true, very good,” and should go on in other respects as he was before? Did he mean that the heathen jailor, continuing in his heathenism or in any other known sin, might and would be saved, only for a strong feeling which he had, that Christ died to save him, and that He was very good and merciful to do so? Nay, my brethren, we all know better than *that*. We know that when the Apostle said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,” he was requiring of the jailor far more than any such inward conviction and feeling. He was requiring of him that he should give up all, change his way of life altogether, turn his mind day and night towards the great, pure, unseen wonders which the Creed of the Apostles would teach him, and live altogether as one believing in them all. This was the Apostle’s meaning when he said, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” This was also our Lord’s own meaning, in those most heavenly and comfortable words, the very Gospel of man’s salvation, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, to the end that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.”<sup>3</sup> “Whosoever believeth in Him;” not with any kind of belief, but with constant, steady, hearty, practical belief. That man shall not perish. For he shall conquer the enemies of his soul: he has *that* within him, whereby he shall overcome the world. So believing in Jesus Christ, we shall not pray to Him in vain. He will give us more and more of His Spirit, which will help us to please and obey Him. Thus, believing the Articles of the Christian Faith, which is the second part of our baptismal vow, is the only safe way for us to keep the first, and the third. We must believe rightly; otherwise we shall neither renounce, nor obey quite rightly. The temptations will be too strong for us, and the commandments too hard.

But, this constant, enduring, ever-present faith, which of us, my brethren, has it as he ought to have? It is too true, that many of us permit themselves to be so taken up with the labours, cares, follies, of this short and miserable world, that they hardly think, from week’s end to week’s end, (even if they do it regularly then) of such high matters as the Creed sets before them. But if they think not of it, how can it help them in temptation? If you go out to your work in the morning without a thought of Jesus Christ Crucified, if you lie down at night without any apprehension of sleeping in death, and of waking afterwards to stand before His Judgment Seat; how can you depend upon His being with you to guard you? What can you expect, but that the Evil one should have power over you, sleeping and waking? Wherefore, I beseech you, beloved brethren, as you have learned your Creed, *use* it. Use it (I know very many of you do so) as a part of your daily devotions; only beware of merely saying the words over. Whilst you speak them, believe them in your heart, and treasure them up against the hour of temptation. The Baptismal Creed, thus put into practice, will by the help of God prove the best help to preserve Baptismal grace; heavenly things will be more and more to you, and earthly things less and less; believing, you will keep the Commandments, and then, whatever happens, you may go on your way rejoicing in Christ.

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<sup>3</sup> John 3:16