

BAPTISMAL REGENERATION  
REFUTED,  
AND  
SPIRITUAL REGENERATION  
EXPLAINED.

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BY  
✓  
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BAPTISMAL REGENERATION,

ETC.

—◆—  
“YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN.”—John iii. 7.

NICODEMUS, to whom these words were addressed by Jesus, though a person of distinction among the Jews, was startled at the doctrine which they contain. He took them in a literal sense, whereas our Lord employed them figuratively. For this ignorance he was reprehended:—  
“*Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things?*” If the common people were ignorant of the Scriptures, and the fundamental doctrines of religion, it was surprising that their teachers should be equally ignorant. The censure on Nicodemus implies, that he had the means of

knowing this truth, that “*a man must be born again, or he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.*” If so, we should expect to find the doctrine somewhere revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures. Hence, in the penitential Psalm of David (li. 5), he says :—“*Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.*” “*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*” Job had before said :—“*Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean ? not one.*” (ch. xiv. 4.) The Lord promises this desired blessing, saying by the prophet Ezekiel, “*A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you : and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh ; and I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them.*” (chapter xxxvi. 26, 27.) Also, by the prophet Jeremiah, “*Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will*



*make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah:—I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”*

These and other similar expressions intimate the doctrine of regeneration, insisted upon by our Lord. From this source, Nicodemus and his brethren might have known the truth, of which they were ignorant: or, at least, it might have prevented that obtuse misunderstanding, which led the Jewish Rabbi to ask:—*“How can a man be born when he is old; can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?”*

But, it is said by the learned, in illustration of our text and its connexion, that it was the custom of the Jews, at that time, to receive their proselytes from the heathen, not only by circumcision and sacrifice, but by baptism; the convert being completely bathed in water; and, after this ceremony, that he was denomi-

nated a new man ; that he was said to have undergone a new birth, and to have commenced a new life. To this practice, it is said, our Lord alluded, when he told Nicodemus :—“ *Except a man be born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*” Consequently, that the *regeneration*, or second birth, so solemnly insisted upon by our Lord, was simply Christian baptism : *i.e.*, “ Except a man be baptized he cannot be saved.”

Not to dwell, for the present, on the improbability of such a meaning, we may safely conclude that no such custom, or, at least, that no such expressions connected with it, could have been in use at the time in Jerusalem, on the reception of converts to the Jewish religion : for, had it been so, and had our Lord meant to refer to it, doubtless Nicodemus would, at once, have perceived his allusion, and would have understood him to speak *figuratively*. When our Lord said :—“ *Ye must be born again ;*” he would have

asked,—“Dost thou mean that we must be baptized with water to become Christians, as the Heathen are to become Jews?” And to this our Lord would have assented, and there all difficulty, all mystery, and all misunderstanding would have ceased. In that case, Nicodemus could never have made so gross a mistake as to suppose that our Lord meant to affirm that an old man must actually become an infant, or rather that he must somehow enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born again. But the difficulty plainly arises from the *novelty* of the expressions, and hence they were taken erroneously in a *literal* sense.

We do not mean, however, to deny that the Jews, *in subsequent times*, did practise such a ceremony, and use such expressions; but we do not find, after examination, sufficient evidence from Scripture or antiquity, that it was done in the time of our Lord. If so, he had no allu-

sion to *Jewish* baptism, when he said :—  
 “*Ye must be born again.*”

But it is said by some, that our Lord certainly did allude to Christian baptism, under this figurative expression. They contend that regeneration is Christian baptism. “Baptism,” says Bishop Jeremy Taylor, “is a new birth, by which we enter into the new world, the new creation, the blessings and spiritualities of the kingdom.” According to this school of theology, the only true *literal* interpretation of our text is :—“Ye must be baptized.” Our Lord’s solemn asseveration must then be rendered :—“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be *baptized*, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” “Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be baptized. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth : so is every one that is baptized.” “Nicodemus answered, how can these things

be ?” And, if our Lord had meant this, well might he wonder ! It was indeed strange that to *see* the kingdom of God, a man must be baptized. For, if by “the kingdom of God” here, be meant the Gospel dispensation, surely a man might see this first, and be baptized afterward.

Inconsistent and improbable, however, as this interpretation is, it is adopted by many as the doctrine of Christ, both among Protestants and Romanists. If they differ in circumstantialia, they agree in essentials. This doctrine of baptismal regeneration is the prime element of their system ; for thereby all infants of a week old if rightly baptized, according to the form prescribed, and by the right minister, are immediately constituted “children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven.”

Here, then, we are at issue. Is it, or is it not the doctrine of Christ, that baptism is regeneration, or that it is “the

instrument of regeneration” in the hands of the Holy Spirit? We affirm that this doctrine is not of God, but of man; a human invention which has long been applied for advancing the selfish and unworthy purposes of worldly men, mis-called the ministers of Christ; and has, too long, deceived and enslaved, and, we fear destroyed, the souls of multitudes, trusting in its truth and efficacy.

With a view to confute this erroneous doctrine, we observe:—

I. That the New Testament guards us against considering baptism as a *saving* ordinance.

In truth, there is no ordinance saving. It is, however, an error, as ancient as the times of the Apostles, to convert a divine ordinance given only for instruction and edification, into a mysterious condition of salvation. Such was the error of some of the Jewish converts to Christianity, of whom we read in the Acts of the Apostles (ch. xv. 1), that they came from Judæa to

Antioch, in Syria, and taught the brethren, saying,—“Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.” This doctrine, however, was merely their own invention: it was opposed by the Apostles, with all their might, and disowned by the Apostles at Jerusalem, to whom the question was referred.

The principle, thus renounced and opposed, was, notwithstanding, applied to Christian ordinances: it met with many supporters, and became the embryo of that apostacy, which, at length, reached its frightful and monstrous maturity in the Papal “Man of sin.” Hence, baptism and the Lord’s Supper were adopted as substitutes for the circumcision and sacrifice of the Jews; and the spirit and doctrine of the self-righteous Pharisee, took a Christian form. This was the original and the most powerful operating cause of the corruption of Christianity, in the first ages of our faith. Hence it became the custom to baptize infants

immediately after their birth, lest, dying without baptism, they should be lost: and, as such saving efficacy was considered to reside in the ordinance of baptism, it was thought that equal, if not greater efficacy was contained in the Lord's Supper: that ordinance was, therefore, administered to infants, as well as to adults, under the notion that there was a conversion of the bread and the wine into the very body and blood of our Lord and Saviour: consequently, that their salvation was rendered doubly sure, first, by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit in baptism, and next by receiving the Saviour himself into them in partaking of the "Eucharist."

These inconsistencies arose from ignorance of the nature and intention of those ordinances. They misunderstood or perverted the words of Christ; first, in his declaration to Nicodemus:—"Except a man be born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of



God." This was interpreted,—“ Except you are baptized you cannot be saved :” next, his saying to the Jews :—“ Except ye eat the flesh of the son of man, and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” This was interpreted to mean :—“ Except you partake of the Lord’s Supper, you cannot be saved.” The inference was that salvation is secured by baptism and the Lord’s Supper. They were regarded, therefore, as saving ordinances, and indispensable to our salvation.

Our Lord, however, in the second case, guarded his own expressions against this perversion, by saying to those who understood him literally :—“ The words which I speak unto you they are spirit and they are life ;” *i.e.*, “ I have a lively, spiritual meaning in what I say.” Beside, the Lord’s Supper was not instituted when these words were spoken, nor was there any intimation that it would be : and it seems very unlikely that our Lord should insist upon a *nonentity* as the absolute

condition of salvation. Moreover, many of those who heard him, and might have been willing to comply with this condition—supposing it intended—might have died before our Lord had made it naturally possible to obey it. In that case, they would have perished for ever, from his delay in the institution of that ordinance, which he had notwithstanding made indispensable for their salvation. So that, however Pope Innocent the First, and after him Augustine, and many more, have so understood the words of Christ, their opinion must be weighed in the balance of sound reason, and not be blindly adopted because of its antiquity or authority.

As to baptism, the Apostle Peter has taken care, under inspiration, to guard us against considering this ordinance as saving. In his first general Epistle (ch. iii. 21), he says:—“The like figure even baptism doth now save us; NOT THE PUTTING AWAY OF THE FILTH OF THE

FLESH, but the answer (or stipulation) of a good conscience beford God.” Here we have a direct negative of the Holy Spirit upon the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. Foreseeing that this error would arise—if it had not already been broached—he instructs us, that there is *no saving efficacy* in the outward act and form of baptism; and that whatever is saving in the rite is entirely spiritual, and consists of a mental vow of obedience to the will of God; or in other words, of a sincere dedication of the person to the service of God. This is the baptism, which is saving, and which is equivalent to the faith, which is the *instrumental* cause of our salvation. Now this mental operation may certainly exist without any external rite performed: and, on the other hand, the rite may be performed, without the mental operation. It is clear that a person may be baptized, merely in compliance with custom, or from deference to authority, or from personal in-

terest, or from fear of consequences, without any such inward feelings as the Apostle Peter says are saving.

If, therefore, we are to attribute salvation to baptism, it is not in the sense which they do, who advocate the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. We are to distinguish with the Apostle Peter, between the outward act and the inward; between that which is saving, and that which is not. We shall find many baptized infidels, and many unbaptized believers; many baptized sinners, and many unbaptized saints; many of the baptized lost for ever, and many of the unbaptized saved for ever. Our Lord himself intimates that persons baptized may be lost, by saying,—“He that *believeth* and is baptized, shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.” He does not say,—“He that believeth not, and is *not baptized*, shall be damned.” He makes the real condition of salvation to consist in faith, which, if genuine, is the

*instrumental, not the meritorious* cause of our salvation.

But it will be said, does not the Apostle Paul, in the Epistle to Titus (ch. iii. 5), declare that God “saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour?” “It is evident,” says an advocate for baptismal regeneration,\* “that baptism is here represented as the mean through which, or the instrument by which, the Holy Spirit of God regenerates us, and thereby makes us heirs of eternal life.”

Now, we must aver, that this is by no means “evident;” for, first, baptism is not mentioned at all, though the word, *loutron*, rendered washing, is generally supposed to refer to that rite. But, surely, the Apostle might have employed this term figuratively, to represent the

\* Dr. Mant’s “Discourses on Regeneration and Conversion,” p. 29.

spiritual purification which is implied in regeneration. Admitting, however, that he has an allusion to baptism, the word "*and*" may as properly be rendered "*even*;" and then "the washing of regeneration is explained to be, "the renewing of the Holy Spirit," which is a just description of the mental change produced by regeneration. But, if the Apostle had baptism in view, there is no reason to think that he meant to confine this change to the performance of the rite; for this would be to contradict all the facts of the Gospel history, and the whole tenour of the New Testament. We observe, therefore,

II. That Scripture never informs us of baptism being the medium of regeneration, *i.e.*, "the renewing of the Holy Spirit."

This renovation may in general terms be described as "Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." (Acts xx. 21.) Let us, then, advert to

some of the instances on record in the Gospel, wherein this change was effected, and we shall see that it *preceded* baptism, consequently, baptism was *not the medium* of producing it.

On the day of Pentecost, addressing the multitude, who were smitten with remorse for the part they had taken in the crucifixion of the Lord, and who inquired, "What shall we do?" the Apostle Peter says to them,—“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.” “Then they who gladly received his word, were baptized.” Here the mental change of repentance and faith, evidently preceded the act of baptism.

The same may be observed of the Eunuch of Ethiopia, to whom the Evangelist Philip was directed by the Holy Spirit, to instruct him in the Gospel. (Acts viii. 36.) “And as they went on their

way, they came to a certain water, and the Eunuch said, See, here is water, what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest; and he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." Then, "he baptized him." Here "the renewing of the Holy Spirit" operating in the way of faith in Jesus, clearly preceded the act of baptism. That rite did not communicate to the Eunuch the grace of faith. The baptism was suspended, until it was ascertained that this grace of regeneration had been already given. The baptism, therefore, served some other purposes, which we cannot here enumerate.

These instances are sufficient to show that baptism was not the medium of conveying the gifts of faith and repentance; and it may also be shown that baptism was not the medium of conveying the *extraordinary* or miraculous gifts, which



distinguished the first age of Christianity.

Thus, when the Apostle Paul found certain disciples at Ephesus, (Acts xix. 1—6,) who had not heard of the miraculous gifts, having been initiated only by the baptism of John, “they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.” “And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came upon them, and they spake in tongues and prophesied.” Here the medium of communicating the gifts was not the baptism; that had been performed: it was done by *the laying on of the apostle’s hands*. This took place after the baptism. But in the case of Cornelius, (Acts x. 44—48,) the same gifts were granted *before* baptism. While the apostle Peter was speaking of Christ, and saying; “to him give all the prophets witness that through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins,” “the Holy Ghost fell on all them who heard the word.” The

Jewish converts who accompanied Peter were “astonished because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost; for they heard them speak in tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, who have received the Holy Ghost, as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.”

What can be more “evident?” If, as the advocates of baptismal regeneration insist, baptism were the medium of communicating either the ordinary or extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit, we should have found some evidence of it in these facts; but we find no such evidence: on the contrary, baptism is considered to be so secondary, that, in the case of Cornelius and his friends, the apostle does not even perform the rite himself, but only commands it to be done by others, and that on the ground of the new converts having *already* received the

Holy Spirit. If it had been the will of God, that baptism should be the exclusive medium of conveying the gifts of his Spirit, he would have made it so to appear in these narratives. We should have had a clear view of the fact. We should have been told of the descent of the Spirit, while the act of baptism was being performed. The rite would have made the most prominent figure in the picture, instead of being placed, as it really is, in the back ground.

The fact is, that the *preaching and ministry of the apostles* were the great instrument which the Holy Spirit employed for the communication of his gifts. It was their *doctrine* which he sealed with his approbation. "Faith came," not by baptism, but "by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." The apostles laid no undue stress on the mere rite of baptism. If it had been the uniform and only medium of conveying regenerating grace, they would have made as much of

it, as those do who maintain that error. We should not hear the great apostle of the Gentiles saying: "I thank God I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius, for Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel." (1 Cor. i. 14.)

If baptism had been the sole medium of that grace, as is pretended, the apostle would have been anxious to baptize as many as possible, and would have thanked God for so doing; and he could never have thanked God that he had baptized so *few*! But it seems "*the successors of the apostles*" are wiser than the apostles, and are possessed of more power!

Having thus argued the point from the evidence of the Holy Scriptures, we can find no ground for the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. It is true, that several places of Scripture are perverted to support that tenet. We are told that nothing can be more plain than that our Lord meant to say to Nicodemus by the words, "Except a man be born of water

and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," that he must be regenerated by the Holy Spirit in Christian baptism. Now we readily admit that our Lord meant to say, that a man must be regenerated by the Holy Spirit, or he cannot be saved; but we deny that there is any evidence that he meant to assert that baptism is the only, or even the usual medium of that divine grace. We are not to imagine our Lord could have no other meaning than that which will serve the purpose of supporting a doctrine, which both He and His apostles elsewhere deny.

Let it then be observed on this text, that an exact translation of the Greek would make it as necessary to be born of *air*, as of water, in order to be saved; for the word *pneuma*, is without the article which is required to make it definite in its application to the Holy Spirit. The exact translation of the text is: "Unless any one be born from water and air, he

is not able to enter into the kingdom of God." We are surprised at these expressions, and so was Nicodemus. The language is highly figurative and required explanation. That explanation was given, and our Lord, interpreting His own figure, tells us that we must be born "from the Spirit" of God; that we must undergo such a spiritual change, as is equal to a second birth. The Holy Spirit, as the great agent in effecting this change, is introduced *after* the disputed text, in order to explain what was meant by this new birth; and, if we consider the nature of those elements by which this spiritual change was signified, in the first information given to Nicodemus, we shall find that the *water* and the *air* are fit symbols of the purification of the soul, in which regeneration consists.

If then we are required to be born of *water* and also of *air*, why not insist on the necessity of *pneumatic* regeneration, as well as of *baptismal* regeneration? Surely

there must be an essential defect in the baptism of water alone, as administered by those who insist on a *literal* interpretation of the word, *water*, and deny it to the word, *air*, which is so closely connected with it, and forms as essential a part of the regeneration. Their baptism surely would be much more consistent and, according to their interpretation, much more effectual, if the priest were to add some *holy breath* with the *holy water*! If he were to breathe on the baptized, which is exactly what the Romish priests do in baptism, and say: "Receive thou the Holy Ghost!" We insist on a *pneumatic* regeneration as well as an *aquatic*, if the words are to be taken *literally*; and, if we are put off with a flimsy assertion, that, in this text, our Lord meant to say, that the *water* of baptism is the *instrument* of regeneration. For this interpretation, however, we may probably be branded as enthusiasts and fanatics, as we are for maintaining the doctrine of

*spiritual*, in opposition to baptismal regeneration. But those are alone answerable for the *real* enthusiasm and fanaticism who maintain the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. Such was the opinion of the late Reverend Mr. Simeon of Cambridge, as expressed in his work entitled "An appeal to men of wisdom and candour." "Which," says he, "has the preference in point of sobriety; the doctrine of a new and spiritual birth, by the operation of the Spirit of God, or that of baptism being the new birth? It is objected to the former doctrine that it is enthusiastic and accompanied with many absurd and baleful errors; *viz.*: that its advocates insist on sudden impulses, which irresistibly, and without any co-operation on our parts, at some particular time, that may at all subsequent periods be referred to, convert the soul to God. Now we have denied that the advocates for the new birth give any such representation of it, or that it is, in its own nature,



associated with any such things. But now observe the doctrine of our adversaries, viz: of those who identify baptism with a new birth: it is curious to observe to what an extent they fall into the very errors, which they impute to us. They say that we are born again in baptism; consequently, they, first, make our new birth, *sudden*: next, they make it *irresistible*, for the child cannot withstand the power of the priest. Next they would make it *without any co-operation on our part*, for the child is wholly *passive*. Next, they make it *arbitrary*, according to the will of man, who may hasten or delay it, or prevent it, exactly as he pleases: whereas it is said of all Christians, that they are ‘born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.’ Next, they make it so *determinable in point of time*, that not the person himself only, but the whole world, also may know it, by consulting the parish register! And, lastly, they are

assured of it, not only without any evidence at all, but in the very face of all imaginable evidence to the contrary! Who, I would ask, are the enthusiasts now? I will further ask, whether the wildest fanatic that can be found at this day in Christendom, entertains notions half so fanatical as these?"

III. Matter of fact undeniably proves that regeneration is not communicated by baptism.

If, indeed, baptism be regeneration, then, of course, all the baptized are regenerated. But we have shown that in the *Scriptural* sense of the term, baptism is not regeneration; and now we say, that the characters of those baptized, do, in multitudes of instances prove, that they have never been regenerated, *i.e.*, renewed by the Holy Spirit. It is inconceivable that the Holy Spirit should reside in the hearts of the profane, the licentious, the false, the cruel, the malicious, the covetous. Yet multitudes of such persons

have been baptized in their infancy, and by the doctrine now controverted, have been born again in the likeness of God, and are therefore “children of God and heirs of the kingdom of heaven.” This anomaly is accounted for by Dr. Mant, who says: “Those are regenerated to whom baptism is rightly administered, notwithstanding by their future conduct, they may forfeit the privileges of their new birth.\* And that the “privilege of *salvation* bestowed by God through the ordinance of baptism, is continued, if they grow up in faith and obedience; *if not*, it is taken away from them till they repent.”†

Wherever this doctrine may have been discovered, it is certainly not derived from the Holy Scripture. That never represents God as versatile and capricious, and the salvation of His children as precarious.

\* Page 7, of Discourses on Regeneration,

† Ibid. p. 17.

It uniformly teaches that salvation is of grace, and not of works; and that the person whom God once calls or adopts, He intends finally to save: thus the Apostle Paul declares (Rom. viii. 29, 30,) that, "Those whom God foreknew, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first born among many brethren. Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called; and whom He called, them He also justified, and whom he justified, them He also glorified." Here is a chain of divine actions, reaching from the purpose to the completion. If baptism be included in it, with all the grace and efficacy imputed to it by our opponents, then, it is either not so effectual as they say, or else God justifies and saves men in their sins. Moreover, the doctrine above quoted makes salvation to depend wholly on the *will* of the individual. If saved, he is entitled to salvation by *his own* merit. If

lost, he has *forfeited the privilege of salvation* by *not growing up in faith and obedience*. Surely this is any thing but Christianity! Christ has no place in this system! A form, a chance, a charm, may save or destroy a soul! On this system we might expect that more souls would be lost than saved. And facts appear to correspond. How few men who have been baptized in their infancy grow up to lead a serious, religious life. The great bulk of those called Christians, are really men of the world, devoted either to gain or pleasure. Do you see the greater number of baptized *men* in the church on the Sabbath? Do you find them at the communion of the Lord's Supper? Will they even endure serious Christian conversation and society? Yet these have all been "born again" in their infancy; they were all God's adopted children—all "heirs of the kingdom of heaven!" The Holy Spirit had entered into them to make them such; but He has left them, it appears, to their

own wayward course: He is gone and has carried away from them “the privilege of salvation,” which he had conferred: they may have been *confirmed* in the possession of that privilege by *Episcopal* authority; but, a short time after that “confirmation,” they became presumptuous and self-willed, and the Holy Spirit could no longer prevail with them to be saved. He has left them to the world, the flesh, and the devil, till they *repent*: then he will return, and bring back the “privilege of salvation.” But, if they should die, *impenitent*, and “in their sins,” then the regenerated children of God, the “heirs of the kingdom of heaven” are lost for ever;—unless there be a purgatory, as feigned by the Romanists, who also hold this doctrine of baptismal regeneration. Who can believe such contradictions?

These apostates, however, *may* repent before they die; then the Holy Spirit will return. But is not repentance itself

a divine gift? Is not Christ said by an apostle to be “exalted a Prince and a Saviour to *give* repentance and forgiveness of sins? (Acts v. 31.) And as the Holy Spirit is the agent in regeneration, so must He be in the restoration. These lapsed children of God cannot be restored, but by that repentance, “which it is the peculiar province of the Spirit of God to impart.” Yet we are told that “He leaves them until they repent, and begin a new life of faith and obedience:” then He is induced to return to them with “the privilege of salvation.” But if the Holy Spirit has left them because of their impenitence, how can it be expected that He will return to them, when he sees them still in the same state? The cause of this departure cannot be the inducement for his return. And yet in that lost state must they remain, unless he return: for “the Ethiopian cannot change his skin, nor the leopard his spots.” According to this doctrine, their case is

hopeless : they are lost beyond recovery. The Holy Spirit is indeed waiting for their "repentance" to reward them, with the forfeited "privilege of salvation;" but they are both unable and unwilling to make the first movement : and unless they move first, the Holy Spirit will remain inexorable. Their salvation is thus impossible !

Where then is the great *benefit* of baptismal regeneration ? What does it effect upon the *real* character ? How easily may any spiritual benefit supposed to be connected with it, be lost ! What great value can we set on a thing so fugitive and uncertain ? Why so strenuous for a doctrine, which, after all, is attended with so little *real saving* efficacy ? Show the lives of the baptized, in general, harmonizing with the doctrine, and we shall then begin to think it may be true. But while there is so dreadful a discrepancy between them, we must be blindfolded by interest or prejudice if we yield to its claims.



But it may be replied: "This is uncharitable, to suppose that so many Christians, regenerated persons, children of God, members of Christ and heirs of the kingdom of heaven, should be finally lost!" This, however, is no supposition, but an inevitable consequence from the premises. The apostate has driven away the Holy Spirit from him and has lost "the privilege of salvation:" he can never regain it without the repulsed Deity shall return to him. The apostate cannot, because he will not, return, and yet he must make the first move! Are these forces not *in equilibrio*? Is there not an eternal barrier to their coalition? If the Holy Spirit were to move *first*, he needs never to have removed at all: because he might have by his presence completed the intention of the baptismal regeneration. But he is gone, and how is he to be brought back again? Those are the uncharitable, who thus consign men, who have "not grown up in faith and obe-

dience," to eternal perdition, and make their salvation contingent upon an impossible condition !. Miserable theology ! Happy are they who are better instructed !

Having thus refuted the erroneous doctrine, let us now more distinctly establish the true. What is it to be "born again ?"

As this language is figurative, we must consider what it is intended to represent. Birth implies a previous formation of the human being in an embryo state, with all its faculties and members, but not in a state of perfection. It is a human body, and a human soul united in one person, and is therefore constituted an intellectual, moral and practical being. As it is born, its nature is depraved, from its connexion with the first parents of our race. It is therefore necessary that it should be "born again." Now, the second birth must correspond to the first. The intention of the second birth is to correct the depravity of the first : if, in the *first* birth,

the *intellectual* faculties are depraved, this is to restore them to their proper tone : if the *moral* are corrupt, this is to purify them : if the *practical* are wayward and wrong, this is to rectify them, according to a perfect standard.

Now the nature of this change, it is evident, does not apply so much to infants just born, as to those, at least, advancing to adult age. I do not say that it is *impossible* it should apply to new-born infants ; but, as the Gospel was, at first, addressed to adults, who were the first persons converted by it ; and, as we are not at all informed in the Holy Scripture of any regeneration taking place in *infants*, we are not warranted to apply the process to them. *We must confine our attention to the case of adults*, or to those who are advancing to some development of their natural powers and faculties. It would be better to consider Nicodemus himself as a specimen of a person who had need to be “ born again when he is

old." How can this be? We answer, such a change may take place in *the whole man*, by the special grace and power of the Holy Spirit, as shall make him "a new man in Christ Jesus."

1st. His understanding shall be enlightened.

The mind of man is so beclouded by ignorance and prejudice, that it is unable, without this change, to discern the simple truths of the Gospel. They are very extraordinary in their nature; and, though they may be stated in a few sentences, they contain all the purposes of God respecting the human race, and his peculiar mode of salvation by the substitution of the innocent for the guilty in the person of our Divine Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. "Great indeed, is the mystery of Godliness!" And clear and strong must be the eye to penetrate it. The man of science will not discern it in nature: the student will not meet with it in polite literature: the men of business

and of pleasure will not perceive this mystery in their pursuits : and even the theologian may be so filled with pride and prejudice, as to require this change to pass on his understanding and his heart, before he shall be able to “ see the kingdom of God ” as it is in Christ. It is not a mind naturally acute and cultivated by art to a high extent of intellectual power that is, of itself, able to fathom these Divine mysteries : on the contrary, many such individuals have been known violently to oppose the truths of the Gospel. The great apostle of the Gentiles is an eminent instance of this blind and furious enmity to the truth. His education, liberal in some respects as it was, only contributed to his prejudices ; and he confesses that he did not then understand the nature and purpose of the law of God. Hence his opposition to Christ. His opinion was, that salvation was to be attained by a strict observance of the law ; and thus, like many others, “ he went

about to establish *his own* righteousness." But when he came to perceive that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth," and that his own righteousness was worthless as a meritorious cause of the Divine favour, he then cordially embraced and zealously preached that Divine method of salvation which, in his ignorant prejudice, he had wished to overthrow. This complete change in his views was the consequence of a Divine influence on his mind, leading him to see his error and to discern the truth; and hence he became "a new man in Christ Jesus." He was "created anew," as he himself expresses it, which is but another phrase for regeneration. He had received from God a spiritual discernment, without which he would have proceeded in his infuriated opposition to the Gospel; for he himself lays it down as a universal truth, that, "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him,

and he cannot know them because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual discerns all things." (1 Cor. ii. 14.)

Now we are not to suppose that a new faculty is added to the mind in this change; but merely that the powers of the intellect are so rectified and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, that the regenerated person is enabled to perceive the truths of the Gospel when presented to his view. Thus Jesus promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit should "take of things relating to him and should show them unto them;" and the Apostle prays for the Ephesians that, "the eyes of their understanding being enlightened," they may know what is the "Hope of God's calling;" implying that it cannot be known without the spiritual illumination, which is a Divine gift. By means of a renovated understanding, a person discovers things before concealed, and believes those which he had deemed false

and incredible. As the astronomer, by the aid of scientific instruments, penetrates beyond the vulgar gaze, so the regenerated man sees a new world, and is conversant with spiritual objects and heavenly truths, unknown to the unenlightened multitude. "If any man," says the Apostle Paul, "be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature, (or a new creation;) the old things have passed away,—behold all things have become new." (2 Cor. v. 17.) This is the true regeneration of the soul of man, in respect to his understanding; but altogether different from the notion of *baptismal* regeneration.

2nd. The *heart* is also renewed.

By the heart, we mean the will or affections and dispositions of the mind, its *moral* attributes and powers. These are even more deranged and corrupted by the fall of man than the intellectual; and therefore need a special divine influence to effect the desired change. This will evidently appear from the account which the Apostle



gives us of the state of man unregenerate. "The carnal mind," says he, "is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." (Rom. viii. 7—9, 14.)

Now the essential principle of all moral goodness is—LOVE TO GOD. But if the carnal or unregenerate mind is "enmity against God," inveterate and malignant enmity, as the word *εχθρα*, imports, it is destitute of the vital spring of real goodness, and is filled with dispositions and affections to that which is evil. If the understanding is blind to spiritual things, the heart is also *dead* to them: and this is the representation of the case by the Apostle, who says to the Ephesian

converts : “ You having been *dead* in trespasses and sins, hath God brought to life in Christ. Formerly you lived according to the course of this world, under the influence of that evil spirit which reigns therein, and obeying the impulse of depraved lusts and passions : a state in which,” says he, “ we all are by nature, and are thus exposed to the just displeasure of God. But by the grace of God we are raised with Christ to the possession of a new life, by the *love of God shed abroad in the heart* through the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit.”

Here then is a real change of heart. The natural enmity of man toward God is “ slain,” as the Apostle expresses it, and the true principle of moral virtue is infused. If the hatred of an object be taken away, and the love of it imparted, what two states of mind can be more opposite to each other ? The person undergoing this change of heart, is as different from what he was, as if he had been made over

again. He is fused and remoulded: he is, in fact, another man as to character, though the same person as to identity.

This change seems even more wonderful than the preceding. It is indeed a miracle for the eyes of one born blind to be opened by a word; but it seems a more stupendous power which brings the dead to life: and, in fact, nothing short of the power which at first produced life, can restore it, either as to the body or the soul. Thus the Apostle attributes it to this very cause, when he says to the Corinthians: "*God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*" (2 Cor. iv. 6.) The omnipotence and the goodness which created the universe can alone effect this change of heart in our fallen and depraved nature. It is, indeed, a moral regeneration; but a very different thing from the *imaginary* change termed "baptismal re-

generation." This is a *real* change in the moral constitution of a man, and is absolutely essential to the being of a Christian. No form of words, no sacerdotal charm, no priestly authority, no law or commandment, or "will of man," can produce it. Here is "the finger of God." Here is the voice of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus, saying in the tone of Deity to the soul dead in sin, "Come forth!" What a wretched imposition on the ignorant is it, to tell them they are regenerated by the Holy Spirit, when they are still dead, by the just condemnation of the law of God, and by the love of sin! What blindness or what audacity must that be, which can thus mislead sinful creatures—especially the young—into a supposition that a religious rite of any kind, can produce this change of heart, and that it is *uniformly* experienced by *every* infant of a week old, by means of a few drops of water, and a few serious words, uttered in an ecclesiastical tone, by a man

in a particular dress for the occasion! Surely, if such deceived souls are finally lost, "their blood will be required at the hands" of their deceivers! Let us shake off such delusions, and open our hearts to a reception of the truth! Let us pray earnestly to God for this regenerating *light* for the understanding, and this regenerating *love* for the heart!

### 3. This change reforms the life.

Such an effect will naturally and necessarily follow from the previous change on the understanding and the heart. "Make the tree good," says our Lord, "and the fruit will be good also." New moral principles will produce correspondent actions. As "enmity to God" in our fallen nature, shows itself in a life of disobedience and rebellion, so "*Love* to God" is expressed by a life of piety, humility, submission, gratitude, and zeal. When the soul is regenerated by the Holy Spirit, the inward and spiritual change will soon appear in the language, temper,

manners, and conduct of the individual. He who was before profane, shall now be devotional. He who was fierce, proud, and irritable, shall now have the meekness and gentleness of the "Lamb of God." He who was riotous, intemperate, and impure, shall now be quiet, sober, and modest. He who was false and fraudulent, shall be now trustworthy and true. He who was covetous and selfish, shall be now self-denying and generous. "Old things have, indeed, passed away; all things have become new:"—new views, new tastes and dispositions, new pursuits and habits, and new society. For here is a new man in Christ Jesus, brought into a new world. "We are God's workmanship," saith the Apostle, "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God hath pre-ordained that we should walk in." (Ephes. ii. 10.)

Many instances of this practical change of life and character appear on the pages of the New Testament; but none are

more striking than that which is recorded of the Corinthians — a people proverbially impure, even amongst the heathens of Greece and Rome. “Know ye not,” saith the apostle Paul to them, “that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” “And such were some of you: but ye have washed yourselves from these things: but ye are sanctified: but ye are justified by the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”

The understandings and the hearts of these very wicked persons had been renewed by the Holy Spirit, and their lives had become holy. They had washed in “the fountain opened for sin and uncleanness,” and repented of their former

courses. The change was *evident* and known. It was so notorious that the Apostle challenges them in proof of his ministerial success. "Ye are our letter" of recommendation, says he, "known and read by all men : . . . ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by us ; written not with ink, but by the Spirit of the living God." (2 Cor. iii. 2, 3.)

This was regeneration in the days of the Apostles : it was evidently a true conversion of the heart and life, from sin and Satan unto God. If any say, that this was effected by baptism, because the Apostle speaks of their being "washed ;" we reply that this term is very often used figuratively in the Scripture for repentance and sanctification : *e.g.*, the Psalmist prays thus : "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." Job says, "If I wash myself with snow water and make my hands never so clean, yet thou shalt plunge me into the ditch,



and my own clothes shall abhor me." The Apostle might use the term in the same figurative sense, without meaning to say that the water of baptism had *literally* washed them from their sins. If, however, that water, or any other, could produce such an effect, as that produced on the Corinthians, we should be as strong believers in the virtue of *holy water* as the votaries of baptismal regeneration. Let them produce their converts, such as the Corinthians, washed from the pollution of their sins by means of baptism, and we will believe their doctrine. But we will not be put off with any thing imaginary and hypothetical. Let us see a vile Corinthian suddenly changed, by the virtue of baptismal water, into a holy Christian, and we shall bow under the force of evidence. For such a fact, however, we expect to have long to wait.

Having thus endeavoured from the Scripture to refute the error of baptismal regeneration, and, from the same autho-

rity, to illustrate the real nature of spiritual regeneration, it will become us to examine ourselves, in order to ascertain whether we have actually been "*born again.*" Our Lord declares solemnly:— "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, you must be born again.*" This spiritual change is absolutely necessary to be a real Christian, and to attain salvation. Is my understanding enlightened? is my heart purified? is my life altered? All persons are not, indeed, so outwardly wicked as the Corinthians; but their nature is equally sinful, and had they lived at Corinth, they would have acted like the Corinthians. Let no one suppose he is exempt from the necessity of this spiritual change. If Nicodemus required it, who was a moral and respectable character, who can be supposed to pass to heaven without it? Until a person see the necessity of this change, he is evidently unchanged; he is still in the pride of his impenitent heart. When one sees and feels the

truth that we “*must* be born again,” the change is already commenced, and will doubtless finish by the production of “a perfect man in Christ Jesus.”

If, then, baptismal regeneration be an error, an imposition, a delusion, how carefully should it be avoided;—how strenuously opposed! If a child, taught in a catechism by a parent, a tutor, a minister of religion, that it has experienced all the regeneration that the Scriptures require—all that it can possibly possess—when it was baptized in its unconscious infancy, should adhere to this prejudice through life, and should thus imagine, in advanced years, that all was well for the soul, and should die under this illusion, unchanged;—die in the natural pride and self-righteousness of our fallen nature, and so should *not* “enter the kingdom of heaven;” how lamentable that such an one should have been taught that error—should have remained through life under

that delusion ! Such a soul will curse the catechism and the ministrations which misled it, for ever and ever : and will beseech that a special messenger may be sent to warn surviving relatives and erroneous teachers, of the danger awaiting them, while clinging to this “ spider’s web,” and leaning on this “ broken reed,” lest they should also “ enter into that place of torment.”

It were better for those who uphold *baptismal* regeneration *now* to consider and repent, and earnestly pray to God for the grace of His Holy Spirit to instruct them in the truth of the Gospel, to enlighten their understandings, to purify their hearts, and to “ sanctify them body, soul and spirit,” and to lead them by a right way, through this wilderness of difficulty and danger, to that “ better, heavenly country,” where they shall meet with “ the spirits of just men made perfect ;” and where they shall shine in the righte-

ousness of Christ and the sanctification of the Spirit, with the reflected glory of the Father—" heirs, *indeed*, of God, and joint heirs with Christ, of that kingdom which is one of righteousness, peace, and joy," for evermore. Amen! Amen!

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