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A DISCOURSE

ON THE

NATURE, THE PROPER SUBJECTS, AND THE BENEFITS

OF BAPTISM,

WITH A

BRIEF APPENDIX,

ON THE

MODE OF ADMINISTERING THE ORDINANCE.

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PREFACE.

PERHAPS there is no institution of the gospel, on which more vague and indefinite ideas are entertained by a large portion of christians, than that of baptism. I have undertaken to state a few principles on this subject, which I hope will be found clear and satisfactory. They will probably be thought to place the nature and benefits of this ordinance in a light somewhat different from that in which they have been commonly contemplated, and I trust more obvious and plain to the apprehension of common christians. In the short compass of a sermon, the illustration of each principle could not be dilated to a great extent. If they are perspicuously expressed, and supported by reason and scripture, every necessary and useful consequence will easily suggest itself to the judicious reader. And I can, with pleasure, refer him to a discourse of the Rev. Robert Finley* on the same subject, for a more ample elucidation of several points, from the analogy which subsists between the Mosaic and the Christian dispensations. Every person, I trust, will easily believe that I could not have been induced to give this discourse to the public

* Just published by B. B. Hopkins, & Co.

through any ambition of reputation as a writer. If this had been my motive, I should have chosen a very different subject. I aim simply to be useful, and to gratify the desire of some worthy persons, who heard it delivered. Happy if I shall be able to assist any serious mind in forming juster conceptions of this important institution.

SAMUEL S. SMITH.

DISCOURSE, &c.

“ What profit is there of circumcision ? Much every way ; chiefly, because that to them were committed the oracles of God.”
ROMANS, iii. 1, 2.

THE rites and symbols instituted by Christ in his church, are, on account of their simplicity, apt to appear to the men of the world unworthy the majesty of God. But, to a true believer, occupied with the sublime and spiritual ideas which they represent, they carry to the heart the most affecting impressions of his condescension and grace. This is especially true of that simple baptismal washing which our blessed Saviour has been pleased to introduce as the seal of the new dispensation of his grace, instead of the bloody and painful rite, by which his ancient covenant with Abraham, and with Israel was confirmed. What can be more simple? Yet, when God condescends to employ it as a symbol of his mercy, and a vehicle to us of the most important truths, it acquires, in the esteem of the believer, an unspeakable grandeur and importance. And if we can enter rightly into the spirit and design of this institution, we shall perceive it to be fraught with manifold blessings to the church.

The particular objection to the usefulness and necessity of circumcision, the type of baptism, which the apostle answers in the text, arose out of the strain of his previous reasoning, in which he had proved, that, to the gentile who did not enjoy the light and the blessings of that revelation made to Israel by Moses and the prophets, the law of nature, written on the hearts of all men, was not only the rule of his duty, but the law by which he should, at last, be judged by God.* Of the Jew a more perfect obedience would be required, in proportion to the clearer light which he enjoyed; and on his transgressions a more rigorous judgment would be passed. If this consequence results from the apostle's argument, an objector is supposed naturally to inquire; what then is the benefit of circumcision? and what advantage does the Jew, notwithstanding his boasted relation to God, enjoy above the uninstructed gentile? To which inquiries the text gives this satisfactory answer: *Much every way; chiefly, because that to this circumcised nation were committed the oracles of God.* By it the Jew is initiated into a church which enjoys a clearer and more certain law of duty; more powerful motives to holiness, and more abundant means of salvation; in which are deposited *the oracles of God*, with all their precious hopes and promises. It is the seal of those promises, the confirmation of those hopes.

* Romans, chap. xi. 14, 15, 26, 27. May not the gentile who fulfils the righteousness of the law as far as his light and understanding reaches, be saved, like many of the ancient saints, by a Saviour whom he has not known.

My design in this discourse is to assume the same ground taken by the apostle, and thence to illustrate the use and benefits of baptism, which is our christian circumcision, *the seal of the righteousness which is by faith*, under the new dispensation of the covenant of grace. But, for this purpose, it is necessary, in the first place, to examine into the true nature and design of the ordinance, and to point out its proper subjects, that, from a just consideration of both, we may finally deduce its benefits and blessings.

That we may have a clearer view of the nature of baptism and the importance of the ordinance, we must go back to the origin of its type in the ancient church.

When religious truth was likely to perish from the world, which, in a few ages after the deluge, was overwhelmed in idolatry, and sunk in extreme dissolution of manners, it pleased God, out of the midst of the general darkness and corruption, to select a church in which he might preserve the knowledge of *his name*, and might deposit his holy oracles, and the future hopes of the universe. This church consisted, in the beginning, of the single family of Abraham, with whom he entered into a gracious covenant, accepting, as his title to eternal life, *the righteousness of faith** in the future Saviour of the world, who was to spring from his own loins; engaging that he would *be a God to him and to his seed after him*; and promising that,

* This is fairly inferred from the expression of the apostle, who styles the seal of the Abrahamic covenant, *the seal of the righteousness which is by faith*.

finally, in him *all the families of the earth should be blessed*, by the advent of the Messiah. That this grace might be rendered the more sure, and that the faith of this chosen friend of heaven might have the firmer ground on which to rest, he added to his *promise*, his *sacramental seal* or *oath*, that by *two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie*, *Abraham*, and all who follow the faith of Abraham, *might have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them*. For, saith the Apostle, *Abraham received circumcision a seal of the righteousness*, that is, of the justification and acceptance with God, *which is by faith*. This covenant, with all its appendages of rites and forms, of types and symbols, of prophets and priests, of altars and victims, with all its doctrines, its precepts, and promises, was placed in the keeping of the church for its consolation, for its *instruction in righteousness*, and for the quickening and direction in the divine life of all true believers.

What profit was there, then, of circumcision? It was the seal which God was pleased to annex to the covenant of his mercy, by which he confirmed to the church the great charter of her spiritual privileges, and which, being impressed on every Israelite, continually reminded him of his obligations, continually recalled him to his duty, continually assured him of the gracious protection of God, continually placed before him his immortal hopes, and designated him as a member of that chosen community to whose pious custody were committed the oracles of God, those precious treasures of divine truth. While other nations were left to

the obscure teachings of nature, and the errors of a depraved reason, this sealed nation were made the depositories of clearer lights, and the heirs of sublimer hopes. The emblems which were engraven, if I may speak so, on that *seal* by which these inestimable blessings were confirmed to the ancient church, I mean the blood of circumcision, corresponding to the water of baptism, pointed to that purity of heart which is the end of all true religion, and to that precious blood which is at once the purchase of our salvation, and the fountain in which all our sins are cleansed. Such was the benefit of the ancient rite to the church founded in Abraham, and afterwards embracing all the posterity of Israel; to them were committed the oracles of God with all their lights, their hopes, their graces, their means of holiness, and of eternal life.

These brief expositions will afford some principles, by which to explain the nature and the benefits of that baptismal rite, which Christ has substituted in the room of the Abrahamic and Mosaic symbol of the covenant. Baptism is our christian circumcision; the seal of a more pure and luminous dispensation of the covenant than that either of Moses or of Abraham. And it is with the view of proposing, as far as I am able, some precise and definite ideas on the initiating institution of the christian church that I have chosen the present subject, and made these prefatory observations on the corresponding rite of the ancient dispensation.

A subject it is in which all christians have a deep interest, inasmuch as it lies at the foundation both of

the spiritual privileges of the church, and of its external fabric of rites and ordinances. It is of importance to give clearness and precision, if possible, to those vague notions, and to correct those erroneous prejudices, on the subject of baptism, entertained by so many of the professors of the gospel, which degrade the ordinance, and impair its spiritual benefits. Many unhappily regard it merely as a pious custom rendered venerable by time, and public opinion, which it would be reproachful to neglect, but which it would be, otherwise, of little consequence to observe. Others conceive of it chiefly as a religious charm, to which is attached some mysterious influence, they know not what, on the happiness of the infant: neither the one nor the other comprehending its true nature, nor feeling the proper force of its obligations.

To baptism, therefore, let me apply the inquiry of the apostle; *What profit* is there in this holy rite? And answer with him; *Much every way; chiefly, because that to us are committed the oracles of God;* the lights of his blessed word, the consolations, the promises, the blessings of the new covenant, under the sacred confirmation of his sacramental seal.*

* This does not imply that every person who is baptized, and is externally a member of the visible church, which has the custody of the oracles of God, is spiritually a partaker of the blessings and consolations of the new covenant; but he is thereby made a member of that body in which is deposited the covenant with its precious promises, comforts, and supports, that they may be freely proposed to all within its pale, to invite and encourage their faith, to instruct and establish them in righteousness, and prepare them for eternal life.

But that we may give as much perspicuity as possible to these ideas, it will be necessary to go into some details with respect to the nature, and the proper subjects of this holy ordinance; because, with these its benefits are intimately connected; and from them, its duties and obligations necessarily result.

1. The nature and design of baptism may be rendered obvious to the capacity of every hearer, from two sources of illustration, one is the use and application of a similar rite, which was frequent in the ancient Jewish nation, whence probably it was transferred into the christian church; the other is the denomination, borrowed from the Abrahamic dispensation of the covenant, which, from the very first ages, it has received among christians, of *a seal* of the covenant of grace.

Many of the great and distinguished teachers and founders of sects among the Jews, applied baptism as a rite of initiation into their respective schools. It was a symbol of discipleship, and regarded as an emblem of that purity of mind, and that virtuous simplicity of manners, which result from the love of truth, and are expected in all those who are engaged in the pursuit of wisdom.* Such was, probably, the meaning of the baptism of John, the illustrious forerunner of the Messiah.

* The same rite of initiation into their schools, and with the same meaning, was frequently used by the philosophers of Greece, as well as by the Magians, Bramins, and Gymnosophists of the eastern nations, from whom the Greeks borrowed it.

He taught a new and more rigorous discipline of repentance than was known to the Jews of that age; and the disciples who followed him, admiring the sanctity of his doctrine, and the abstemious purity of his manners, he initiated by baptism,* preparing them in this manner, for that still more pure and self-denying, and perfect discipline which was shortly to be introduced by the Saviour of the world.

It was, besides, required by the customs of that nation that all proselytes from among the gentiles should be initiated into the church of Israel, and make their profession of the doctrines of Moses, and the prophets by baptism.†

* This fact serves to explain a passage in the Acts of the Apostles, which has created no small difficulty to many interpreters. Paul, meeting with certain disciples in Asia, who were very imperfectly instructed in the principles of the gospel, demanded of them, *unto what they had been baptized?* that is, to what system of doctrines. They answered, *unto John's baptism.* They were disciples of John, and had embraced only the doctrines of repentance which he had taught. But when the apostle unfolded to them more clearly the true evangelical doctrine, the elements only of which had been preached by John, they were then baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

This custom serves also to explain the meaning of St. Paul, when he thanks God, 1 Cor. i. 14, that he had *baptized none of them but Crispus and Gaius, &c. lest any should say he had baptized in his own name,* and was thereby setting himself at the head of a new sect.

† Maimonides says, “ In all ages, whensoever any gentile was willing to enter into covenant, and to be gathered under the wings of the Shechinah, and to undertake the yoke of the law, he was bound to have circumcision and baptism, and a peace-offering, or

The ordinance of baptism, therefore, considered simply in the view which has been just presented to you, contains a pledge of our discipleship, a public avowal of Christ as our great master and teacher, an explicit profession of our faith in the doctrines taught by his Spirit in those holy oracles committed to the custody of his church for its illumination and sanctification.

Although a man, at the age of reason, may justly make this profession for himself, you ask, perhaps, if a parent can rightfully make it in the name of his infant, so that, when that infant shall have arrived at maturity, it shall be considered in law as his act? Whatever differences of opinion may exist with regard to this question, according to the various lights in which the subject of it may be viewed,* all will

as the Gemara calls it, *the sprinkling of blood*: and if it were a woman, baptism and sacrifice."

Many great critics and antiquarians have maintained that there were two grades of proselytes from among the gentiles, *proselytes of righteousness*, whom Maimonides characterizes by "being willing to be gathered under the wings of the *Shechinah*, and to undertake *the yoke of the law*; who were, therefore, *incorporated* into the nation of Israel by the rites which he mentions; and *proselytes of the gate*, who did not submit to all the onerous ritual of Moses, but believing the divinity and excellence of his scriptures with those of the prophets, were received only to certain privileges of the chosen people by baptism and sacrifice.

* Upon this subject, one would think that there could not reasonably exist any diversity of opinion. It seems to be a manifest principle that a parent has a right to enter into contract, or to make any engagement in the name of his child, *for his benefit*, which it

agree in the following principle, that it is both the right and the duty of a parent to place his beloved offspring under the best means to enlighten and cultivate their minds, to form their hearts, to regulate their lives, and to prepare them, if possible, for the highest happiness both in this world, and the world to come: in one word, to initiate them in the school of Christ. This school is the church: these means of education are the ordinances, the instructions, the discipline, the watchful care, the prayers of the church. And it is one, and not the least of the spiritual blessings resulting from baptism in infancy, that, thereby, parents, in addition to the tender constraints of natural duty, impose upon themselves the most solemn voluntary obligations *to train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*; and that children enjoy still further advantages by being placed under the immediate and special care of that holy community to whom are committed the oracles of God.

But there is another and more interesting light in which this ordinance is to be viewed; it is *the seal* by which God has condescended visibly to confirm to the church the blessings of that new covenant which he has graciously established in Christ for the redemption of the world. This was the import of the correspondent rite of the church of Israel. God gave to

is the *privilege* of the child, when he arrives at mature age to accept, although he is at liberty also, to his own detriment, to reject it, and which, if it involves his duty, as well as his interest, as in the present case, he is under sacred obligations to fulfil. Such engagement is not imposing on our posterity *a burden*, but gaining for them *a benefit*.

Abraham *circumcision, a seal of the righteousness which is by faith.** And this is one of the principal denominations by which baptism has been designated in the christian church from the earliest ages. But here it is necessary to remark, and correct an error upon this subject, which has unhappily disturbed the ideas of many good and excellent men. Baptism has been regarded by them as the seal exclusively of the believing parent given both in his own name, and in that of his child, as its natural proxy, testifying, on his part, his entire acquiescence in the conditions of the covenant, and, by the same act, laying the child under an obligation of acquiescing in them, and fulfilling them, as soon as it shall attain the age of reason. And, undoubtedly, the act of the parent in offering his child to receive the seal of baptism, is, on his part, a formal acknowledgment of the covenant and profession of faith in its gracious promises. It is likewise admitted, and has been before asserted, that a parent possesses from nature, and from religion, a right to enter into

* *A seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had, being uncircumcised.* This expression cannot reasonably be supposed to mean, as has been asserted by some writers, merely a declaration of the sincerity of *Abraham's* faith. For this seal was administered to the offspring of Abraham at an age at which no such declaration could be expected from them. Besides, the apostle, in the place, is speaking of circumcision, not merely as a sign given to Abraham in particular, but as an ordinance of the church. In this general view it was designed as *a seal of the righteousness of faith*; that is, of that gracious covenant which has substituted *the righteousness which comes by faith* in our Lord Jesus Christ, as the condition of our acceptance with God, in the room of *perfect obedience* required by the first covenant, and which has now become impracticable to the frailty and corruption of human nature.

any covenant in the name of his child, when the objects of that covenant are only blessings and privileges; and especially when its conditions or terms are antecedent duties.

But, notwithstanding these palpable truths, baptism, in the just and scriptural view of it, is to be considered principally as that outward and visible *seal* which God has been pleased to annex to his own *promise*; a promise which he has graciously given to the church under the form of a *covenant-engagement*, by this seal, ratifying and confirming to her, and to all who are taken into her care, and protection, the propositions of his mercy and grace through Jesus Christ. Abraham did not *give* to God the seal of circumcision as a pledge of his duty and obedience, but the scripture declares, he *received* it from God, in order to confirm that gracious *covenant* or *promise*, which he had just made to the father of the faithful; *I will be a God to you and to your seed after you.**

* If we refer to the whole strain of the history in the 17th chapter of Genesis which records this transaction of God with Abraham, this interpretation will be confirmed. It was a covenant entirely of the *gratuitous* kind on the part of God, engaging by an expression of the most comprehensive meaning, "I will be a God to you," &c. to bestow the most ample spiritual blessings on his chosen servant, and on his posterity. In every covenant of this nature, the forms of ratification are used only by him, and are intended to oblige only him who bestows the favour. The beneficiary simply receives the promise or charter, which, when confirmed by the requisite legal forms, and ratified by the seal of the benefactor, becomes his title of inheritance or possession, on the performance of whatever condition it contains.

It was not an infrequent thing for God thus to confirm his promises and covenants to patriarchs and holy men in the scrip-

Do you ask if it is not doing dishonour to the faithfulness of Jehovah, to suppose that his promise requires to be confirmed by symbols and sacraments, by oaths and seals? Is not his word alone the firm and immutable foundation of every believer's trust and hope? It is true, the veracity of God needs no support from outward forms; and it is not for his sake, but for ours, that he is sometimes pleased to employ them, in order to give the deeper impression to divine truth upon the heart. Frail as we are, and receiving all our impressions through the medium of the senses, ideas, merely intellectual, neither are so clearly conceived, nor take such firm possession of the soul, as when they are embodied, if I may speak so, and conveyed to us under sensible images. It is not therefore unworthy of the glory and the wisdom of God: on the other hand, it is a proof of his infinite benignity and condescension, to confirm to us the everlasting truth of his word by such impressive and external symbols, as will unite the influence of sense with that of intellect and faith, in giving the doctrines of his grace their full effect upon the mind. Hence God has been pleased to exhibit the *promises* of his mercy to man-

tures, by some external sign, or token. His promise to Noah he confirmed by his bow in the clouds. To Gideon he gave a sign or seal of his commission to be the leader and deliverer of Israel, by consuming his sacrifice upon the rock. To Abraham he gave the sign of circumcision; and on another occasion, he sent a burning lamp to pass between the parts of his sacrifice. To Hezekiah the sign of the shadow returning back upon the dial was added to the promise of his recovery. And to the house of David, and of Israel, he gave, by the prophet Isaiah, this mysterious sign, *a virgin shall conceive and bear a son.*

kind through Jesus Christ, under the gracious title of a *covenant*; and, after the manner of such conventions among men, and in order more perfectly to adapt himself to that susceptibility of sensible impressions which belongs to our nature, he has condescended to confirm his truth in that covenant by publicly and visibly annexing to it his own seal. Let me illustrate this idea by an analogy borrowed from civil transactions. As charters, conveying special privileges to corporations, or to individuals, are sealed and authenticated by public officers duly appointed and commissioned for that purpose by the sovereign power; in like manner is this precious charter of our spiritual and immortal privileges confirmed to us by the seal of the Great Head of the church, affixed to it in the name of God, by ministers solemnly set apart for this end, according to the order which he has established in his spiritual kingdom, so that whatever is rightfully performed by them may be justly said to be done by him. Baptism, then, is the seal of God applied to his own covenant, thereby confirming to those to whom it is administered the propositions of his mercy through Jesus Christ; thereby visibly testifying, that they are taken from under the curse of the original and broken covenant, which admitted only of perfect obedience, and condemned the transgressor to eternal death, and placed under a *new dispensation of grace*, which confers forgiveness on repentance, and salvation on the obedience of faith.

And, as every public seal contains emblems expressive of the nature, and security of the blessings it confers, we see, in like manner, this christian seal

distinguished by emblems, the most simple indeed, but the most expressive and august. We see in it the symbol of that precious blood which was shed for our redemption; we see in it the symbol of the Holy Spirit, by whose gracious influences the principles of a divine life are infused into the soul, and cherished to perfection; and finally, we see in it the symbol of that heavenly purity, which should adorn and distinguish the disciples of Jesus Christ.

Thus have I presented to you this ordinance in its double signification: as the rite, by which we are initiated into the school of Christ; and as the seal, by which God continually repeats, and confirms the gracious propositions and promises of his covenant to the seed of the church.

2. What profit is there, then, in being baptised? What are the benefits of baptism? This question I might proceed immediately to resolve, but that it is necessary, in the first place, to ascertain the proper subjects of this holy ordinance. For, on the right of our children to receive the seal of the covenant depends, in my view, its principal advantages. This right, then, is demonstrated from analogy; from scripture example; and from the whole stream of the history of the primitive church.

In the first place, from analogy. If the father of the faithful received from God *the seal of the righteousness which is by faith*; that is, of the covenant of grace, in which that faith, which unites us to Christ, and is the principle of a holy life, is accepted instead of the

perfect righteousness of the law; and if he was permitted, as a precious privilege, to impress it on all his offspring; does not this right hold, with still stronger reason, to believing parents, under the dispensation of the gospel? Is it not confessed, that the coming of the Messiah, far from having abridged, has greatly extended the privileges of the faithful.

Let us hear the clear and strong language of St. Paul. *The promise,** saith the apostle, *was not to Abraham, or his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. And it is of faith that it might be by grace,* (that is, of free favour without any meritorious works) *to the end that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not to that only which is of the law,* (or his natural posterity, composing the Jewish church,) *but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham,†* the believing gentiles who should be called to a participation of his privileges. What, then, is that *promise* made sure by the seal of the covenant to *all the seed*, both under the law and under the gospel? Let us look back to the institution of this covenant with Abraham, and of the holy seal by which it was confirmed, and there we find the promise, *I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee.‡* This is what was

* *That he should be heir of the world*, meaning, perhaps, that his blessing, which consisted in obtaining salvation through the righteousness of faith, according to the tenor of the covenant of grace, and not by the works of the law, and the blessing of having God for his God, and the God of his seed after him, should hereafter be extended to the whole gentile world.

† Rom. ch. iv. v. 13, 16.

‡ Gen. xvii. 7. This promise evidently comprehends the blessings of the covenant of grace. For although some writers

emphatically called *the promise* by the ancient Jewish writers; and is frequently referred to, likewise, under the same title, in the writings of the apostles. And, when thus referred to, the sacred writers manifestly intend the peculiar promise of the gospel, which is the promise of salvation by Christ through the righteousness of faith, and comprehends all that is implied in the covenant of grace. Of this no other proof need be adduced than its being so often put by them in contrast with the law.* The seal of this promise therefore, was the precious privilege of the seed of Abraham;

have pretended to limit it to the possession of the land of Canaan, and the particular and gracious providence exercised over the nation of Israel, it surely cannot have that meaning when applied to his spiritual seed among the gentiles, or that *which is of the faith of Abraham*, of which the apostle was just speaking.

* See particularly epistle to the Galatians, ch. iii. 16, 17, 18, 21, 29.—18, *If the inheritance be by works of the law, it is no more of promise.* 21, *Is the LAW, then, against the PROMISE of God?* 24, 29, *The LAW is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. But, if we be Christ's, then are we ABRAHAM'S SEED and heirs, according to THE PROMISE;* that is, according to the promises or covenant confirmed in Christ, which accepts the righteousness of faith in the room of the works of the law. 16, 17, *Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. And this I say, that the covenant (plainly implying the covenant contained in the promises), which was confirmed before of God in Christ, the LAW which was four hundred and thirty years after cannot disannul, that it should make the PROMISE of none effect. The promise is here equivalent to the covenant made with Abraham: and what covenant could that be, which was confirmed of God in Christ, but the covenant of grace?*

It deserves here to be remarked, that the very language which is used, *the covenant confirmed of God*, corroborates, and places almost beyond doubt, the opinion formerly advanced, that circumcision under the ancient dispensation, and baptism under the new, is *the*

it was the privilege of his children's children to the remotest generations. And, on the same ground, pursuing the apostle's reasoning, it is the privilege of the children of his faith: *for they who are of faith are the children of Abraham. If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to THE PROMISE; the promise given to Abraham at the institution of the covenant, I will be a God to thee and to thy seed after thee.* But further to confirm this conclusion, can any language be stronger, or more unequivocal, than that of the apostle Peter to the vast assembly at Jerusalem touched by his powerful discourse? *Repent, and be baptised, 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. For THE PROMISE is unto you, and to your children, and to all who are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.* As soon as he commands them to be baptised, he reminds them of an ulterior duty, to baptise their children, and their household, after the example of Abraham; quoting to them that covenanted promise with which every Israelite was so well acquainted, and to which every believer, as well as Abraham, is entitled; the promise of forgiveness, and acceptance with God, through the righteousness of faith. And not *to you only, and to your children*, who are naturally descendants of Abraham, but to the gentiles also, if they be obedient to the faith, although by nature they are *afar off** from

seal of God affixed to his own covenant to confirm it to our faith, and give it impression on the heart of the believer.

* This is a phrase by which the gentile nations are often designated in scripture language.

God. Called by Christ into the church, which was so long confined to the posterity of Israel, they are now equally entitled to all its blessings, and its privileges, and, among others, to this precious seal of the covenant for themselves and their offspring.

It is in vain to allege, as has been done by certain writers, that the *promise* here refers to the prediction of the prophet Joel, who foretold, that, *in the last days, God would pour out his spirit upon all flesh*. For, what connexion has this prophecy with the command *to be baptised*. The apostle is answering the anxious inquiry of his hearers who *were pricked in their hearts; men and brethren, what shall we do?* And, in his answer, he directs them to the proper source of peace and consolation; *repent and be baptised*, and you shall receive the Holy Ghost in his sanctifying power, and his comforting influence; for the promise through Christ whom I preach, is, according to the tenor of the covenant with your father Abraham,* *to you and to your children*; and not to you only, but to the gentiles also, *to those who are afar off*, who shall become the children, and heirs of Abraham's faith.

Such is the clear and obvious conclusion resulting from the apostle's words. The same consequence appears to me to arise, with no less certainty and force, from the advice addressed by St. Paul to a believing husband, or wife; not to separate from the unbelieving wife, or husband, with whom they may be respectively

* Those whom the apostle was addressing were chiefly Jews assembled at Jerusalem from various nations.

connected. For, saith he, the unbeliever is *sanctified* by the believer; *else were your children unclean, but now are they holy*. But now are they *holy*. What is the proper import of this term? Throughout the sacred scriptures it is applied solely to such persons and things as are peculiarly set apart, and consecrated to God. In the connexion in which it stands in this passage, it can imply nothing less than that children are qualified, by the piety and faith of one of their parents, to be solemnly *set apart from the world and devoted to God*. And in what manner shall that consecration be made in the christian church, but by the ordinance of baptism?*

If the right of infants to the ordinance of baptism evidently results, as by the preceding illustrations it appears to do, from the analogy of the christian with the abrahamic seal of the covenant, it is still farther confirmed by the practice of the apostles, and the

* It is a prostitution of language to confound, as has been done by the writers of one sect of christians, *holiness* with *legitimacy* of birth. Has legitimacy of marriage, or of birth, ever depended, in any nation, on the piety of the parties, or the absence of it, or on any other cause but the laws of the state? Besides, the whole train of the apostle's observations and reasoning, translated according to this meaning of the term, would be absurd, or ridiculous. *For the unbelieving wife is sanctified, or made a legitimate subject of marriage, by the believing husband, and the unbelieving husband is sanctified, or made a legitimate subject of marriage, by the believing wife; therefore their marriage was lawful; else were your children illegitimate, but now are they legitimate*. Besides other absurdities, this would be proving the lawfulness of the marriage by the legitimacy of the children, and again, the legitimacy of the children by the lawfulness of the marriage.

uniform history of the primitive church. The passage, to which reference has just been made, affords no slight attestation to the practice of St. Paul. In addition to this, when Lydia declared her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the same apostle, along with her, baptised her household. And with Jairus also, he *baptised all who were in his house*. It has been objected, to the evidence which we would derive from these facts, that those, who are referred to by the sacred historian, in the house of Jairus, and the household of Lydia, were only the adults of the respective families, who were themselves believers. What will not the prepossessions of party, or the pride of theory, maintain and defend? For this pretence certainly, the history affords no ground. It assigns no other reason for baptising these families than simply the faith of Lydia and of Jairus.*

I add, that, if any apostolic usage can derive confirmation from the uniform practice, and tradition

* This was perfectly conformable to the example of the Jewish church in receiving proselytes, either by circumcision, or by baptism, from the gentile nations. The pagan convert, who professed his faith in the great Legislator of Israel, and the promises made to the fathers, at once incorporated his whole family along with himself into the body of that chosen people.

It is said, indeed, that in the history of the New Testament, baptism is never administered except to a personal profession of faith. But, let it be remembered, that this history records chiefly examples of proselytes from unbelieving nations. In a similar case, a personal profession of faith would be required by the warmest friends of infant baptism. But, in the few instances in which families have been mentioned, we see that they always follow the faith of the head.

of the church, from the first ages down to modern and very recent times, it is that of infant baptism.* It is confirmed by Justin Martyr, who lived only forty years after the age of the apostles; and the evidences of it are conveyed down in a continued and unsuspected stream of history to the time of St. Augustine and Pelagius, who, though antagonists in the controversies which were raised in that age on some of the most important doctrines of religion, and both of them among the greatest scholars, and most eloquent writers of the period in which they lived, declare, that they “had never heard, they had never read of any, even in the most heretical churches, who denied the baptism of infants.”*

* But few of the writers of the earliest age of the christian church have escaped the ravages of time, and come down to us entire. And no controversy existing, at that period, on the subject of baptism, few occasions occur of directly introducing any precise opinions concerning it; or of explicitly stating the practice of the apostles, and their immediate successors. But, wherever this ordinance is mentioned, either more or less directly, the testimony of the primitive writers is uniformly in favour of the baptism of infants. In the second, and especially in the third, and following centuries, circumstances having more frequently called for express and definite opinions on questions relative to this subject, the practice of the primitive church becomes, from this time, more and more evident. Justin Martyr, and Irenæus, who lived from forty to sixty-seven years after the apostles, both speak of those “who were *made disciples*, and *regenerated* to God in infancy;” a figurative mode of expression, familiar in that age, to signify baptism the symbol of *discipleship and regeneration*. Just. Mar. Apol. 11. Iren. adv. hæres. lib. 3. cap. 39.

Tertullian, who lived about a hundred years later than the apostles, and who was remarkable for the austerity of his character, and the singularity of many of his opinions, advises, con-

Having established the right of christian parents to have their beloved offspring placed under the guar-

trary to the general sentiment and practice of the church, "not to hasten the baptism of children, except in cases of necessity, or in danger of death." This very advice of Tertullian, however, demonstrates the practice of the church to have been in favour of the baptism of infants; and the cases which he excepts show his own opinion of the necessity of the ordinance. The reason on which he grounded an advice so extraordinary in the age in which he lived, was the danger to which sponsors exposed themselves by the too early baptism of children, and persons under age, "especially" as he adds, "young women" placed in situations of peculiar temptation and danger, and who were, therefore, exposed to great hazards of being seduced, before marriage, from the path of virtue. It is the remark of a judicious writer, that the reason here assigned by this father for his advice renders it probable, that it refers entirely to those young persons of both sexes, who were bought as servants, and were always baptised in christian families; or, to those destitute children and youth who were, very frequently in that age, adopted, or taken to be educated by pious and wealthy persons, who of course became sponsors for them in baptism. Tert. de bap. cap. 18.

In the second century, some doubts having arisen in the church concerning original sin, and the nature and degree of the guilt which adheres to infants, we find, in the discussions which arose out of these subjects, more frequent mention made of the baptism of infants than in the former period. The illustrious Origen, who flourished in the very beginning of the second century after the apostles, maintaining the original corruption of human nature, derives one of his principal arguments from the universal practice of the church, of administering baptism to the youngest children. "If infants, says he, are not liable to original sin, why are they then baptised? If there were nothing in them which needed forgiveness and mercy, the baptismal grace would be unnecessary to them." Homil. 8. in Levit. cap. 12. In another treatise he says; "For this reason it was that

dianship and care of the church, in the ordinance of baptism, let us examine, in the next place, what are the privileges and blessings conferred by it.

the church received from the apostles a tradition, or order, to administer baptism to infants. For they, to whom the divine mysteries were committed, knew that there is in all persons the natural pollution of sin, which must be removed by water, and the Spirit." Comment in ep. ad Rom. 1. 5.

St. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, who wrote about one hundred and fifty years after the apostolic age, establishes the general usage of infant baptism by a most convincing fact. He informs us, that "a council of sixty-six bishops being assembled at Carthage, a doubt was proposed by one of them, whose name was Fidus, whether baptism ought to be administered to infants before the eighth day after their birth; doubting whether or not the custom of the Jews in this respect ought to be followed. The council unanimously decreed, *that baptism is not to be postponed till the eighth day.* After stating the grounds of their decree, they conclude in these words, *Wherefore, dearly beloved, it is our opinion, that from baptism, and the grace of God, who is benignant to all, none ought to be prohibited by us; and, as this is to be observed with respect to all, so especially is it to be observed with respect to infants who are just born, and deserve our help and the divine mercy.*" Cyp. ep. ad Fidum, cap. 63.

The last two articles I follow with the very pertinent remark of the author of a pamphlet entitled, *The Baptism of Infants a reasonable Service.* "Origen was born about eighty-five years after the apostolic age. His father and grandfather were both christians. And, as there can be no doubt of his being baptised in infancy from the manner in which he speaks of infant baptism, this fact verifies the practice of the apostles upon this subject, and carries up the universal usage of the church to within a very few years of these blessed companions of our Lord. A similar observation may be made concerning the bishops who composed the council of Carthage. Many of them were probably very old men; and if they were baptised in infancy, as the language of the decree leaves us no room to doubt, we see

Whether we consider baptism as the rite by which our children are initiated into the church as the school of Christ, or, as the seal which God has been pleased to annex to his covenant in order to ratify, and more effectually to confirm to our faith the promises of his grace, its privileges and blessings, rightly understood, are manifold and great; for, to Abraham and his seed, to the church and the seed of the church, are committed the oracles of God, with all their lights, their comforts, their aids, their precious promises, their immortal hopes. In order to give at once force, and illustration to this reflection, imagine your children not to have been born under a dispensation of grace; imagine them to have received existence in the darkness of paganism; and to have been left to the feeble glimmerings of nature to lead them to a knowledge of their Creator, their Redeemer, and their duty; imagine them, under all the calamities of life, to have been forsaken of the comforts of religious hope; and, after their most anxious endeavours to look into futurity, and to appease the forbodings of conscience, or of fear, unable to penetrate beyond this dark sphere, or to discern any certain means of access to the holy and righteous Judge of the universe, and, at length, abandoned to the cruel despair, which, without the light of revelation, rests upon the shadows of the grave; imagine all this, and then judge of the inestimable value of that blessed sacrament which, agreeably to the command and authority of Christ, places us, from the beginning of life, in the bosom of the

again, the practice of infant baptism clearly prevailing at a period immediately bordering on the age of the apostles."

church, where a divine illumination continually shines ; where life and immortality are brought to light ; where the veil which covers the eternal world is drawn aside ; where the way of peace is clearly revealed to sinful and perishing men ; where the care of parents, and the fidelity of the ministers of religion are engaged under the most solemn obligations for the discipline and instruction of the infant mind ; where the influences of the Holy Spirit are promised to assist the effect of these instructions ; and where all the means and aids are enjoyed which it has seemed good to the infinite wisdom of God to afford to mankind for the attainment of their everlasting salvation.

Such are the blessings connected with baptism considered merely as an initiating symbol, introducing us into the church of Christ. We are placed by it under the happiest and most effectual cultivation for heaven.

Let us now contemplate this symbol in another light, as the *seal* which God has annexed to his covenant for the solemn confirmation of his promises, and we shall discover, in this view of it, a new treasure of spiritual blessings.

Every child of Adam, by *his* error and fall, and by the rigorous tenor of the violated covenant, had become an heir of death. But God, in his infinite mercy, at the very moment of transgression, placed the

frailty of man under a dispensation of grace in Jesus Christ.*

Of this most benignant and merciful dispensation, which obviates, or remedies the evils of the broken law, circumcision anciently, and now baptism, is the gracious assurance and seal. In the symbol of baptism, therefore, you behold the visible pledge, and annunciation, on the part of God, that the baptised infant is taken from under the rigorous and impracticable conditions, and the curse of the first covenant, and placed under the grace of the second.† You behold that precious infant, on its first entrance into existence, met with the covenant of peace, and the promises of eternal life sealed in the blood of the Redeemer, and offered to its acceptance. You behold its original guilt covered by the merit of the atonement.‡

* If man had not been placed under the government and providence of a Saviour, immediately after the fall, would Adam have survived his transgression? Is not the existence of his posterity a demonstration that the world, from the beginning, has been under an economy of grace? But its lights clearly shine, as yet, only in that church which he has selected, and sealed to himself out of the world. Do not these inquiries deserve at least a serious consideration?

† It is not by this intended to say, that the act of baptism transfers us from one covenant to the other. That was done by *the promise of the Saviour*, after the fall. But that it is the solemn authentication of this truth on the part of God, and the declaratory seal of this grace.

‡ “The apostles,” says Origen, (see note, p. 42.) “to whom the divine mysteries were committed, knew that there is in all persons the natural pollution of sin, which must be removed by water and the Spirit.” Though I would by no means go so far as to

Christians! how rich the grace, how precious the promises sealed in baptism to us, and to our beloved offspring! What strong and persuasive motives to repentance, love and new obedience, does this inestimable mercy set before us! What powerful obligations does it impose on parents, and on the whole church, to train up in the love and obedience of the Redeemer, every infant committed by him to their fidelity, their instruction, and discipline!

What then, does the washing with water in this ordinance actually regenerate the soul originally corrupted and impure? Is the cleansing of the body necessarily accompanied with the purification of the spirit? No; *the waters of regeneration*, and other similar expressions used by the fathers to indicate baptism, some of which have been already quoted, do not, when fairly interpreted, convey this meaning. They are only strong figures, in their highly rhetorical stile, expressive of that inward purity of heart of which baptism is the symbol, and which our initiation into the church and school of Christ, and introduction to the privileges, the blessings, and grace of the new covenant, are intended, and fitted to produce.

Is baptism then, a certain title to eternal life? It is a solemn and authentic proposition of the covenant of

say, with Origen, and others of the fathers, that the original *pollution* of our nature is removed by *baptism*; yet I scruple not to say, that original guilt is so covered by the *blood of the atonement*, symbolised in this ordinance, that its condemning power, at least with regard to baptised infants dying in infancy, is destroyed by the grace of the new covenant.

grace with all its privileges, blessings, and conditions, under the seal of God. It is, therefore, a visible and sacramental confirmation of our provisional title to life and immortality on the terms of the gospel; that is, of a sincere repentance for our sins, and a true faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me illustrate it by a familiar example. By charter from the government of your country, or bequest from a dying parent, you become entitled to ample privileges, and rich possessions, on the performance of certain conditions. The seal annexed to that charter, or that testament, by the proper authority, is the declaration of the will of your parent, or your country, and, consequently, the formal authentication and security of your title, the moment the condition is fulfilled. This condition is, to all who have grown to such mature age as to be capable of actual sin, not perfect obedience according to the tenor of the first and violated covenant, but *repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ*, which however leads to perfection, and plants in *the heart* the seeds of holiness and eternal life. But to every infant, dying in infancy, it is an unconditional assurance of a glorious inheritance in the kingdom of heaven. The infant being placed under the grace of the second covenant, is delivered from the curse of the first; being united by a new and blessed relation to the second Adam, its original taint and impurity, derived from its relation to the first, is covered, as I have said before, by the blood of the atonement; and it is, therefore, through the mercy of God in Christ, made an heir of everlasting

life.* Of these precious truths baptism is the sacramental pledge, the seal of assurance and confirmation given by God. What a consolation, christian parents! does this present to you who weep over the dear remains of the infant snatched untimely from your embrace! What a comfortable and extended view does it exhibit of the grace of the gospel!

Having offered to your consideration, in a few plain and obvious principles, the right of infants, born within the church, to the seal of the covenant, and the blessings of which they become partakers by it; it may not be unuseful more particularly to designate the limits of the *visible church*, and to point out the nature and extent of that profession of the name of Christ which entitles a parent to offer, and the church to receive his infant offspring in this holy

* Very far would I be from insinuating that those who die without baptism do, therefore, fail of salvation. But between the baptised and unbaptised infant, dying in infancy, there is this difference, that, to the one, the inheritance of eternal life is conveyed by covenant from God, under his appointed seal; the other is left to his free, indeed, but uncovenanted mercy. And, as the scriptures give us ample grounds to believe that there are various degrees in the blessedness of heaven, it is reasonable to conclude, that those, who are received into *the general assembly of the church of the first born*, from the church on earth, obtain a richer inheritance than others, and are admitted to a higher state of happiness. With regard to such as survive the imbecility of infancy, and arrive at the age of reason, undoubtedly, those who are nursed in the bosom of the church enjoy greater advantages than the pagan world, for the attainment of salvation, under the culture of Christ, and under the gracious influences, and superior aids of the Holy Spirit, which accompany the institutions of the gospel.

ordinance. And happy shall I be, if, by the following brief reflections, I shall be able to remove the doubts, or compose the solitudes of any serious and well disposed mind upon this subject.

The principal doubt turns on this single point, whether the church on earth consists only of those who are truly regenerated, and have added sincere, and *new obedience* to their open profession of the name of their Redeemer; or embraces all those who, having been baptised, and continuing to profess the name and doctrines of the Saviour, submit themselves to the counsels, admonitions, reproofs, and to the whole discipline of that spiritual body whose head is Christ.

The constitution of the Jewish church, the counterpart and type of the christian, will assist us to determine this question. All who believed in Moses, the great prophet of God, and submitted to his law, were embraced in the external bonds, and received the distinguishing seal of the covenant. But *they were not all Israel who were of Israel*. A distinction existed among them, which must always exist upon earth among the professing disciples of Christ, between the visible, and the invisible church. The latter is composed of those only who, by sincere piety, and an entire renovation of heart, bear the inward image of their Lord and Master. The former embraces all who are united together under the profession of the same system of doctrines, who enjoy the same ordinances, and who submit to the same discipline for regulat-

ing the exterior order and manners of its members. To the church of Israel, comprehending the entire nation, were the oracles of God committed. And the seal of that gracious covenant, which was contained and explained in these oracles, and exhibited to the ancient church under a thousand typical rites, was impressed on all their offspring, and on all who were born in their houses and trained up in the knowledge of divine truth under their care. Analogy, then, will lead us to extend the application of the christian seal to the households, and especially to the children of all who are members of the visible church; that is, who have been themselves baptised, who acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, who profess to embrace the holy scriptures of truth as containing the only certain rule of duty, and the only foundation of their immortal hopes; who submit themselves and their households to the discipline and instructions of the church, and who promise to concur with her in the pious education and government of all those whom nature hath given to their affection, or providence hath subjected to their authority.

To the invisible church baptism cannot be confined, because men have no certain rule by which to discriminate it from the mass of visible professors. Let me speak freely to those of my brethren who believe that somewhat more is necessary in the recipient to the validity of this ordinance than regular morals, an open profession of the faith, and submission to the discipline of the church. Is it because they esteem the actual sanctification of the parent essential to the

rightfu. administration of baptism to the child? Who then can know with certainty that he is baptised? Do they say, that it is at least necessary that, in the judgment of charity, a parent should be a sincere believer? Where is the scripture rule which rests the benefit of baptism on our judgment of the internal state of a man's heart; or makes it the standard by which we are to admit his infant to the external privileges of the covenant of grace? Will not those judgments of charity vary in different churches? Will they not vary, perhaps, in different ministers in the same church? Too earnestly he cannot be admonished, indeed, that vital and universal holiness of heart and life is essential to salvation, and is essential to the faithful and acceptable discharge of this, and of every duty in the sight of God; yet is it not essential to the validity of this ordinance, and its spiritual benefit to his infant offspring.

Let us recur again to the proper meaning and design of the ordinance, and this conclusion will not fail to strike us with additional force. It is, in the first place, the rite of our initiation into the school of Christ in which we receive those lessons of divine wisdom, which cannot be taught to man by the wisdom of the world; and in which we enjoy the happiest means of promoting our virtue and holiness, and the most effectual aids for the attainment of our salvation.

It is, in the next place, the seal which God hath been pleased to annex to the external dispensation of his covenant, in order that he might, by a rite so

solemn, though so simple, confirm the propositions of his mercy to fallen man, through the atonement and mediation of the ever blessed Redeemer. The church openly annexes this seal to the covenant, in the name and by the authority of God himself. The church takes the infant under her protection and instruction. Most desirable it is to have the cooperation and assistance of the parents in this sacred and important duty; and they are bound by every obligation of nature and religion to afford it. But, it is still more the duty of the church to enlighten and direct the infant's opening reason, to imbue it with holy and heavenly principles, to illustrate, to inculcate, to press upon it the precious privileges, the gracious promises, the glorious hopes, of which she has given it the seal. The church, when she is faithful to her trust, adopts every infant whom she receives by baptism within the pale of her privileges. It is *her* faith, *her* fidelity, which is to be regarded in this ordinance even more than that of the parent.

It is with the view chiefly to the pious education of the seed of the church that this ordinance is administered to infants. *I know him*, saith God, of the father of the faithful, at the institution of the external seal of the covenant, *that he will train up his children and his household after him, to keep the way of the Lord*. In the primitive ages, when many parents were incapable themselves of fulfilling these holy duties, benevolent and pious sponsors offered themselves to discharge them in their room. But the church herself was considered as sponsor, and she is the best and most

faithful sponsor for every infant which she receives to her protection and care by this ordinance. On this ground it was, that she required exposed children, and children of whatever parents, with the care of whose pious education she charged herself, to be admitted to the holy rite of baptism.

But you ask if the church does now truly fulfil this duty? Alas! we cannot but acknowledge and deplore the relaxation of her discipline. But, let me boldly and openly pronounce, that it is incumbent on her, animated with the spirit of her Lord, her teacher, her example, and her head, to extend her holy inspection and her guardian care over every baptised person, who, in consequence of his baptism, forms a part of her spiritual community.*

After the view which has already been presented to you of the nature and the subjects of this holy ordinance, little more can be necessary.

* Does this principle imply an obligation on the parent to bring his baptised infant to the Lord's supper, a practice which we learn from several passages of the Fathers, obtained in many of the primitive churches? I answer, by no means. The infant, in baptism, is the passive subject of the divine mercy, proposing to it the gracious terms of everlasting life; as a testamentary and provisional devise may be made to a child antecedently to the development of its understanding. The believing communicant, on the other hand, gives a believing and voluntary pledge of his fidelity to God, which requires, in order to perform it rightly, a certain maturity of the powers of reason. The infant *receives* the seal of God confirming the propositions of his mercy; the communicant having embraced these propositions for himself, affixes

3. In the last place, to answer the great inquiry, What profit is there in this our christian circumcision? What are the privileges it confers? What are the obligations it imposes?

In baptism the great charter of our salvation, with all its gracious promises, its merciful conditions, and immortal hopes, is confirmed by the seal of God. That transfer which, under the spiritual dominion of the Redeemer, has been made of our infant offspring from the curse and condemnation of the first covenant to the grace of the second, is, in this ordinance, palpably exhibited to our senses. Inestimable benignity and condescension! thus to be met by God, if I may speak so, at our first entrance into being, with the gracious propositions of eternal life through Jesus Christ, confirmed to sense, as well as to faith, by a rite so solemn! The testament of our dying Saviour, sealed with his most precious blood, is visibly offered anew to believers and their offspring, at every repetition of this baptismal symbol. Christians! what subjects of gratitude and praise, what animating encouragements to early piety do we find in this merciful condescension of God; in this gracious care of the Redeemer, extended over all the infant seed of the church!

In order to render this grace more effectual, these infants are introduced into the school of Christ, and

his own seal to the covenant, thereby declaring his acceptance of the terms.

placed under all the advantages of the culture and discipline of the church, which is bound to instruct, to admonish, to reprove, to correct; whose duty it is to open to them the blessings, to inculcate upon them the duties, to press upon them the obligations, arising out of this early mercy and care manifested by Heaven for their salvation. And, still further to secure their immortal interests, do we not see them, when devoted to God by their parents, returned again by the church to the arms, and to the natural guardianship of these affectionate parents, under new and most sacred obligations to assist her in cultivating and training them up for eternal life. The powerful bonds of nature, which lie on every parent to consult the spiritual and everlasting welfare of his beloved children, are here strengthened by all the sacredness of religion, and by his own most solemn vows given in the presence of God, and in the name of the Redeemer.

Christians! who have been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus, look back with thankfulness to that mercy, which has met you in the first moments of existence, though heirs of death through the fault of your original parent, with the propositions of eternal life through Jesus Christ; which has surrounded you with so many guards against evil, with so many lights and aids to duty, and placed you under such an excellent culture for heaven. Whenever you witness the administration of this holy ordinance, let it carry back your thoughts to your own early and inestimable privileges; to the moment when you were consecrated to God; to the sacred obligations which his mercy

has imposed upon you. Have you been sprinkled and washed with the waters of baptism? Remember the necessity of being *sprinkled from an evil conscience*; of being cleansed by the precious *blood of sprinkling*; of being purified in the fountains of repentance. Do you enter the church where the faithful continually assemble to worship God? Let it recal to mind that sacred action by which you were made a member of that holy community, which is *the body of Christ*. Has the seal of God been impressed upon you? Was it not that he might designate you for himself; that you might be separated from the world, and devoted to him; that you might walk worthy of that grace to which you are called? Have you, in that precious seal, received the symbol of regeneration? Remember what purity of heart, what sanctity of life, becomes a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Such are the obligations, and the privileges of those who, from their birth, have been consecrated to God in this holy institution; who have been received by Christ, the great Teacher of mankind, into his school; who have been, as it were, incorporated, by the great Head of the church, into his body.

What then, Christian parents! are the obligations which this holy covenant imposes upon you? Are they not, that, like Abraham, you should *train up your children, and your household after you, to fear the Lord*? A virtuous and pious education, indeed, involves duties to which *nature* will prompt a faithful parent; being connected with the highest interests,

the eternal happiness of his offspring. And the God of nature has imposed them upon you by inviolable obligations. But, I entreat you, christians, most seriously to consider, what additional force these holy obligations acquire by your own solemn vows, by the awful majesty of religion, by the name of Jesus which is named upon your infant seed, and by the precious blood of the covenant, signified by the baptismal waters in which they are washed. Most assiduously and faithfully, therefore, train up these dear pledges of your love, this precious seed of the future church, *in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*. Teach them justly to value the unspeakable grace by which they have been *engrafted into Christ*, and incorporated into his visible body the church. Unfold, and press upon them, the wide compass of their duties. By your instructions, by your prayers, by your example, by your prudent discipline, study to form them to habits of virtue and piety. Make your houses temples of the living God, in which you will daily bring them with you before the throne of the heavenly grace, to commit them anew to the mercy and protection of the Saviour. Be patriarchs, and priests in your own families. Ah! remember, that the souls of those who are dearest to you by nature, are still more sacredly committed to your charge by the authority of religion. Heirs of eternity in common with your children! carry forward your view to that everlasting state of being on which you will shortly enter with them, and to that dread tribunal at which you and they shall appear, to account for your mutual fidelity to your respective vows and duties. Hear them, there, mingling, along with the

triumphs of heaven, and the hymns of praise, which they raise to the grace of the Redeemer, their benedictions on *you* for that pious care which has conducted them to glory and immortality; or, amidst the cries of despair, Oh! horrible idea! pouring forth the curses of perhaps a perishing son on the head of a guilty father, who, by a cruel and impious neglect, has caused his ruin! Can I say more to urge these holy and parental cares upon a faithful and feeling heart?

O God, our Saviour! put life into thine own ordinance! Dispose and enable every parent before thee to fulfil, with fidelity, duties of such high concern to his own soul, and to those whom he should love as his own soul! And, when we baptise with water in thy name, baptise thou, Oh! most merciful Redeemer! with the Holy Ghost! Amen!

A BRIEF APPENDIX,

ON THE MODE OF ADMINISTERING BAPTISM.

IF the mode of administering baptism had been essential to the validity of the ordinance, we should have justly expected to see it prescribed with as much particularity as any of the levitical ceremonies. On the other hand, there is no definite prescription on this subject, farther than, that water is to be applied as a symbol of that regeneration and purification of our nature, which all men need, and which a sincere faith in the gospel is intended and fitted to produce. Any application, therefore, of this cleansing element, which is a natural emblem of spiritual purity, especially if it be justified by the usage of the church and the import of the terms employed by the sacred writers, is its proper and legitimate form. In the warmer climates, where daily bathing is the customary mode of cleansing the person, immersion may be used with the highest propriety: in other regions, where it is commonly effected by washing only a particular part of the body, a partial application of water may be made with equal reason. An action of our blessed Saviour, recorded in the thirteenth chapter of the gospel of John, is full of instruction on this subject. It was usual with the Jews before eating, to wash their feet; a practice which had become necessary, both from the fashion

of their dress, and their manner of reclining on couches at their meals. Christ, in order to give his disciples a lesson, at once of humility and of purity, condescended himself to wash their feet. When Peter understood the meaning of this rite, that it was a symbol of his purification, and acceptance with his Lord, he exclaimed, in the fervor of his zeal, *Lord! not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.* But, as what the Saviour was doing was only a symbolical action, cleansing that part of the body which it was customary to wash at that time, was sufficient to answer the intention; therefore he replies to Peter, *he that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit.*

Having made these preliminary remarks, I observe that the term *baptism* in the sacred writings is applied, indifferently, to signify either *partial* or *entire* washings; either *sprinkling* or *immersion*. It is unnecessary to recite all the passages in which this is demonstrated. To one or two only I shall refer. When Jesus went to eat with a certain pharisee, the pharisee *wondered that he had not first washed*;* referring to the Jewish custom of washing their hands before meat. But in the original it is, “he wondered that he had not first *baptised*.” “Many other things there be,” says the evangelist Mark, † “which they have received to hold, as the *washing*, [in the original, the *baptism*,] of cups, of pots, of brazen vessels, and of tables.” As the sacred writer, probably, refers to the instruments of

* Luke, xi. 38.

† Mark, vii. 4.

the temple service, or to those domestic utensils which were religiously purified according to the same forms, the whole levitical ritual proves that these purifications were effected by various sprinklings, or aspersions.* As the term baptism, and all those derived from the same root, are employed to signify sprinkling and partial washing no less than immersion, so it is well known that the primitive church used indifferently, and according to present convenience, the one or the other of these forms in administering the baptismal rite, particularly in the case of *clinici*, and those of great delicacy of constitution, or of health. And, in forming our judgment of the validity of the mode by aspersion, it deserves to be particularly remarked, that *sprinkling* is, throughout the sacred writings, used as one of the most common and significant emblems of purity, of cleansing, of repentance, of every thing that is implied in the waters of baptism. Not to speak of the innumerable aspersions used for this purpose under the Levitical law, the blood of the atonement is expressly called *the blood of sprinkling*.† Isaiah, in announcing the office and the grace of the future Messiah declares, *he shall sprinkle many nations*.‡ The prophet Ezekiel in proclaiming the sanctifying influence of the gospel, does it by this figure, *Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean*.§ And, when the apostle would express, in the strongest terms, that purity of

* See Levit. xiv. ch. Num. viii. and xix. ch. Heb. ix. 19, 21.

† Heb. xii. 24. ‡ Is. lii. 15. § Ez. xxxvi. 25.

mind which, in our approaches to God, we ought to bring with us to the throne of grace, he says; *Let us come to him, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.**

But I forbear to multiply proofs. These are sufficient to demonstrate that either mode, by immersion, or by sprinkling, will answer the whole intention of the ordinance as an emblem of that purity of life which becomes a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The evidence on which the exclusive advocates for immersion as essential to the rightful administration of this ordinance chiefly rely, is an expression used by the apostle in his epistle to the Romans, and in that to the Colossians,† *buried with him by baptism.* Whether this allusion be made or not, to the practice of immersion borrowed from the custom of bathing in that warm climate, it establishes no exclusive and indispensable *mode* of baptism. It is an expression highly figurative; and no argument can be safely rested on a figure of speech. It affords, at best, but a collateral and indirect support to other arguments, by its supposed reference to an existing custom. But admitting that reference to be real, in the present case; and the inference establishing the existence of the custom to be ever so justly drawn, still it could not impose immersion on the church as the indispensable and exclusive form of baptism. For, if the custom were to form a rule which could not be departed from, that custom should be entirely and completely

* Heb. x. 22.

† Rom. vi. 4. Col. ii. 12.

followed. But I presume baptism with the person entirely naked, which was the practice where plunging was used, in those warm countries, in imitation of bathing, would not now be pleaded for by any sect. The habits, modes, and customary ideas of that age took away that sense of impropriety which would very justly shock the delicacy of modern sentiments. Even on the ground, then, of this figure containing a reference to an existing custom, that custom would not infallibly bind every age and climate.

But let us carry on this argument from figure into the following verses, and see how it will operate; *For*, saith the apostle, *if we have been planted in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this that our old man is crucified with him.** Here are three figurative terms, in three succeeding verses, all referring to the ordinance of baptism and its symbolic signification of a death *to sin*; viz. “*buried with him into death;*” “*planted in the likeness of his death;*” “*our old man crucified with him.*” According to this reasoning, therefore, baptism should contain something in the mode of its administration corresponding to all these figures: and, if the first figure is supposed necessarily to contain the justification of the mode of baptising by immersion; the last will, on the same ground, contain the justification of the church of Rome in the use of the sign of the cross. But, as the friends of immersion do not admit the latter consequence, those who conform to the practice of baptising by sprink-

* Rom. vi. 5, 6.

ling, with equal reason, do not esteem themselves bound by the former.

Upon the whole view of the subject, I conclude, and I think from the fairest reasoning, that the *mode* of administering baptism, whether by sprinkling or immersion, is not essential to the validity of the ordinance, which requires only that the emblem of its cleansing and purifying virtue be significantly preserved.

END.











