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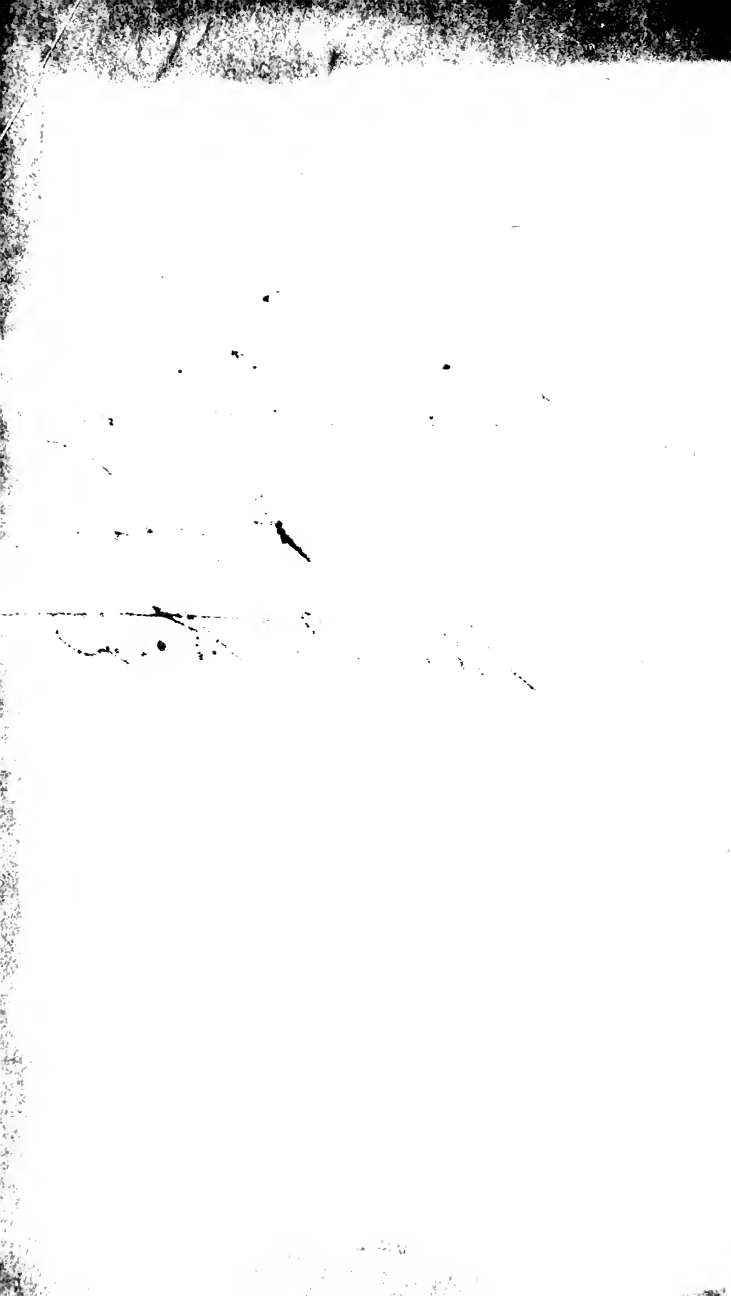
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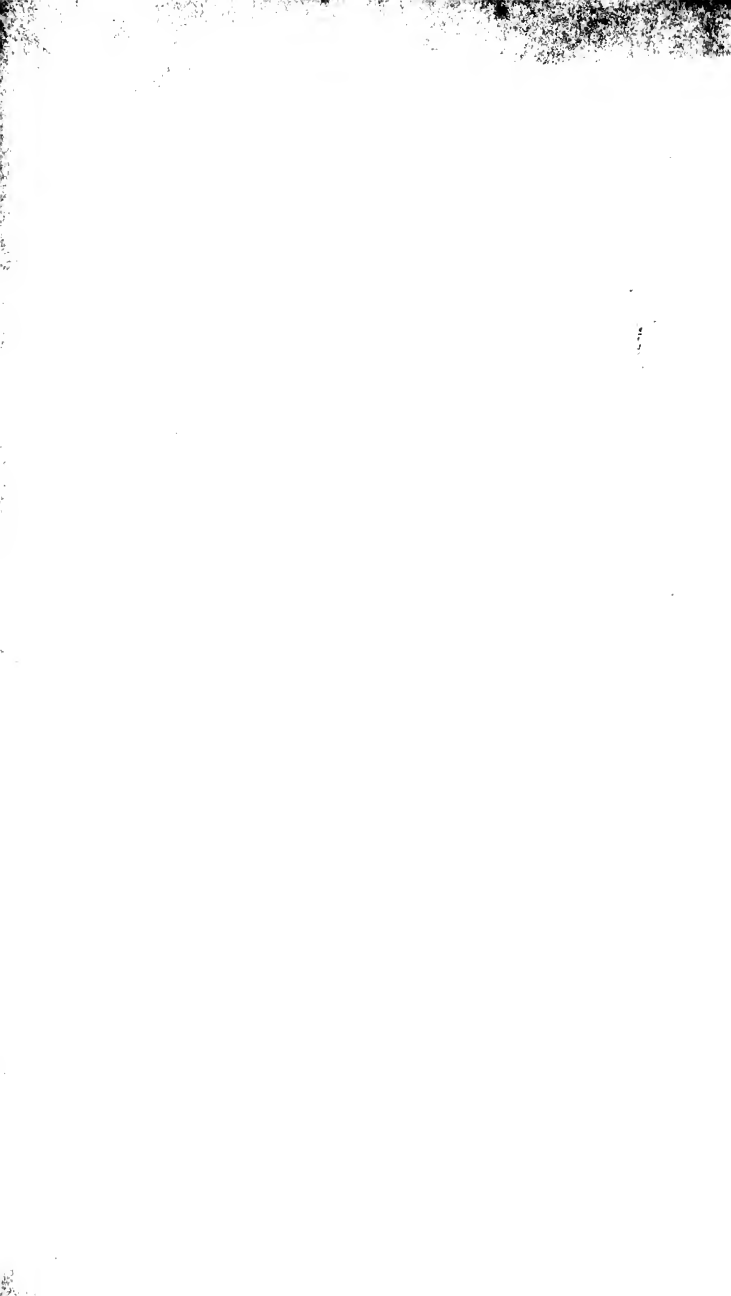
Letters explaining the

Abrahamic covenant

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LETTERS

EXPLAINING

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT,

WITH A VIEW

TO ESTABLISH, ON THIS BROAD AND ANCIENT BASIS,
THE DIVINE RIGHT

OF

INFANT BAPTISM;

AND

THE QUESTION RELATIVE TO THE MODE OF ADMINIS-
TERING THIS CHRISTIAN ORDINANCE:

ADDRESSED TO THE MEMBERS OF THE SECOND PRESBY-
TERIAN CHURCH, IN PHILADELPHIA.

BY JACOB J. JANEWAY, A. M.

JUNIOR PASTOR OF SAID CHURCH.

PHILADELPHIA:

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DISTRICT OF PENNSYLVANIA, TO WIT.

* BE IT REMEMBERED, That on the sixth day of June,
* in the thirty-sixth year of the Independence of the United
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* of the said District, hath deposited in the said Office,

the Title of a Book, the right whereof he claims as au-
thor in the Words following, to wit:—

“Letters explaining the Abrahamic Covenant, with a view to
“ establish, on this broad and ancient basis, the divine right of Infant
“ Baptism; and the Question relative to the Mode of Administering
“ this Christian Ordinance: addressed to the Members of the Second
“ Presbyterian Church, in Philadelphia. By Jacob J. Janeway, A. M.
“ Junior Pastor of said Church.”

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torical and other Prints.”

**D. CALDWELL, Clerk of the
District of Pennsylvania.**

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LETTERS, &c.

LETTER I.

Introductory.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

Positive ordinances of religion are sovereign appointments of the Great Head of the church. Antecedently to their institution, the actions required by them may be indifferent or even unlawful; but being ordained, they become as really binding on conscience, as any moral precept. Enjoined by such high authority, they cannot be disregarded, without involving a violation of that fundamental principle on which all laws, whether moral or positive, rest: viz. the obligation of a creature to obey the will of his Creator.

No pretence, then, of a high degree of spirituality in divine worship, can release any from the duty of observing all the positive institutions of the Christian church; nor screen those who, for

this, or any other reason, disregard them, from the guilt of acting in opposition to the will of God. Being appointed by his authority, it is our indispensable duty to observe them; and, as he is perfectly acquainted with human nature, and can, and will, add his blessing to every ordinance of his own appointment, it must likewise be our interest.

To render obedience to any positive institution acceptable to God, it must flow from a regard to his authority. The observance of one not appointed by him, is mere will-worship; and the observance of one expressly appointed by him, from any motive short of conviction of duty, and respect to his authority, is, in fact, no obedience. It concerns, then, every Christian, who desires to render acceptable worship to his God, to see to it that he is duly persuaded, that the positive ordinances which he keeps were really instituted by divine authority; and that he observes them agreeably to divine directions. But this persuasion he cannot have, nor can he act understandingly, unless he be acquainted with the nature of these ordinances, and the instructions given concerning them. It must, therefore, be his duty to search the scriptures on this subject. This is at all times incumbent; but more especially so when his practice is censured and condemned as being unlawful and unscriptural. Then it behoves him to appeal to the great rule of his faith and practice, the Bible; and examine whether it do not

contain a warrant for what he presents to his God as a part of the worship demanded from him. Doubts with respect to duty mar religious service, and render it less pleasing to the Supreme Being. Hence, we are directed to "draw near to God with a true heart, and in full assurance of faith." The more complete our conviction of acting in conformity to divine appointment, the more acceptable will be our worship. Every Christian should, therefore, endeavour to gain full satisfaction with respect to positive ordinances, and to free his mind from those doubts which spring from diversity of sentiments among his fellow Christians.

There are two extremes to be avoided. Some exalt positive institutions too high in the scale of religion. They insist so much on them, and speak with so much vehemence, that, although they may not intend to represent them as being indispensable to salvation, and as having a saving efficacy, yet they produce, on uninformed minds, wrong impressions with respect to their nature and importance. This is one extreme. On the other hand, we are not to make light of these ordinances, as if it were a matter of indifference whether we understand and observe them or not. Into this extreme many run. They look upon positive institutions with so little regard, that they will not take the trouble to inquire into their nature and obligation, and examine whether they

comply with them according to their original appointment, and the instructions relative to them delivered in Holy Scripture. An insult to the wisdom and authority of our great Lawgiver! Every thing in religion has not, we admit, equal importance. Some things are, and others are not, essential. There is a great difference between the foundation and the decorations of a building. Still, however, every appointment of God in the government of his church is of importance. Nothing can be indifferent which bears the stamp of his authority. Does he speak? we are bound to hear; and assuredly, if we listen to his voice with due regard, we shall derive useful instruction. Hath he recorded his will? it is our duty to read, that we may learn and do it. The order of his house is wise, and good: and if we would stand approved members of it, we must conform to all his regulations and institutions. Positive ordinances constitute an important part of this established order. Every Christian, therefore, who consults his own comfort and edification, will look at them in this light, and endeavour so to understand their nature, design, and import, as to observe them in a due and conscientious manner.

The remarks which I have made on positive ordinances in general, will apply with all their force to baptism in particular. Few professing Christians venture to deny it to be a standing ordinance in the church of Jesus Christ. This truth

is taught with such clearness in sacred scripture, that no room is left for doubting. Two questions, however—one respecting the subjects, the other the mode of baptism—have been, for a long time, and with great warmth, agitated among Christians. Whenever these questions become a fresh subject of controversy, doubts will arise in the minds of persons who have not carefully examined them, whether they are acting agreeably to the will of their Lord, in the manner in which they observe this Christian rite. These questions have, for a few years past, been made the subject of much discussion, by those who deny the right of infants to baptism, and the validity of that mode in which this ordinance is administered in our church: and as many of you, my brethren, have, at different times, heard our faith and practice condemned as unscriptural, it is not unreasonable to suppose that doubts on these points may have been excited in some of your minds. It requires a mind well established in the truth, to resist, without wavering, the force of objections uttered with boasting confidence, and urged with incessant repetition. The perpetual dropping of water will make an impression on solid rock.

By these reflections, I shall stand justified in discussing the two questions relative to baptism; and in laying before you, as briefly as may consist with a just investigation of them, the evidence by which the right of our children to this sacred ordi-

nance is supported, and the mode, used by our church in administering it, vindicated. My object in doing this, is, to endeavour to remove the doubts which may exist in the minds of some, and to confirm the faith of others. I have no wish to enter into controversy. These letters are published with no such view. They are published chiefly for the instruction of that people among whom it has pleased Divine Providence to make it my duty, in connexion with my worthy colleague, to labour in the ministry of Jesus Christ. In composing them, I endeavoured to lay aside all asperity of temper, and to exercise the spirit of the gospel; so that none who read them may have just reason to complain of being treated with harshness or uncandid animadversions. In a word, my desire has been to strip them of every appearance of controversy, so far as could consist with a proper vindication of the truth, and necessary defence of our own principles and conduct.

Some may be disposed to ask, why the publication has been made. The simple truth of the matter is this. Several months ago, I determined to prepare and preach a course of sermons on the subject discussed in these letters. I chose as the ground of them, Gen. xvii. 7. "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." Proceeding in the ex-

execution of the plan which I had sketched out, it soon appeared that it would be necessary, either to handle the discussion in a manner so brief as would make it unsatisfactory; or to preach so many sermons that your patience would be exhausted, and the hours of too many sabbaths occupied by the same topics. By this consideration I was induced to relinquish the idea of preaching on the subject, and to pursue it more at large with some view to a publication. Accordingly I employed part of my time not appropriated to preparations for the Sabbath and other duties, in writing these letters. Having brought them to a close, and hoping that, by the blessing of God, they may confirm your faith, and direct your practice, I send them to you from the press.

That view of the questions above mentioned, is here presented, which I judged would place them in the clearest and most convincing light. The arguments might have been increased in number, as well as expanded by elucidations. But I have consulted brevity. Sufficient evidence, however, will, I trust, be found in the ensuing letters to satisfy your minds, that both our faith and practice are scriptural.

The right of children to baptism, we ground on that well-known covenant made with Abraham, by which the visible church of God was constituted and organized in his family. Since the establishment of it, many governments, formed by the wis-

dom of man, have waxen old and decayed; kingdoms have sprung up, flourished, and passed away, as flowers of the field; and the laws and decrees by which they were managed, have sunk into utter oblivion. But this covenant, this grand constitution of Heaven, unlike to human compacts and human laws, has, by the ravages of time, neither lost its remembrance, nor been diminished in its binding authority. In Holy Scripture, it stands recorded for the instruction and comfort of all generations. Age has contributed to make it the more venerable: and the right secured by it to children has, by long continued enjoyment, become the more stable.

This covenant, constituting the church of God in the patriarch's family, was made with him as the head and representative of Gentile-believers, as well as of his natural descendants, in the line of Isaac and Jacob. It gave to children the right of being members of this holy society: and, remaining to this day unaltered in its grants and provisions, it still secures to them the same invaluable privilege. Hence, it follows, with abundant evidence, that they have a divine right to the covenant-seal, the token of their relation to God, the sign of fellowship in his church, and the badge of citizenship in the great commonwealth of Israel. To favour a doctrine which unjustly deprives children of their long enjoyed right, and expels them from that church of which

the Great Head made them members; some have spoken contemptuously of this covenant, as promising nothing more than temporal or external blessings. But all who understand its true nature and real import, and are acquainted with the unity of God's government over his church, will regard it as the great charter of the privileges, blessings, and hopes, which he has granted to believers, and to their seed.

The nature of this gracious covenant has, by the controversy carried on with respect to infant baptism, been involved in much obscurity; and every thing in it favourable to the right of children, made a subject of dispute. Hence, it is necessary to prove, by solid arguments, many points which might otherwise be taken for granted; and to extend further than might be expected, the discussion of the nature and properties of this covenant, in order to establish firmly the several principles on which the right of our children to baptism rests. I must, therefore, solicit your patient attention. By assuming several particulars which I have endeavoured to prove, this discussion might have been much shortened: but then it would have been rendered less satisfactory and convincing, to those who know how to distinguish between bold assertions and solid arguments.

The view of the Abrahamic covenant, presented in these letters, will, it is hoped, tend to throw light on the dealings of God with his church, and

on several important, though difficult, passages of Holy Scripture; and serve to increase your estimation of the blessed privilege of dedicating your children to God in baptism, as well as to confirm your faith in that article of our creed, that they are by **RIGHT** *members of his visible church*, and, therefore, *ought to be recognised as such, by impressing on them the seal of his gracious covenant.*

The several leading points which it seemed necessary to prove, and which I have endeavoured to establish, are the following.

I. The covenant made with Abraham, contains both spiritual and external blessings.

II. It is a perpetual covenant.

III. Gentile-believers and their offspring have an interest in it.

IV. The covenant imposes very serious and highly important duties.

V. The grand result of these truths, is, that the children of God's professing people have a divine right to baptism.

LETTER II.

The Covenant contains both Spiritual and External Blessings.

CHRISTIAN BRETHEREN,

Two errors are embraced with respect to the Abrahamic covenant. Some insist that it contains no spiritual blessings, but promised to Abraham and his seed only temporal favours. Others, while they admit that it included temporal privileges, prior to our Saviour's incarnation, assert that, since that event the reason of them having ceased, it now contains only spiritual blessings. In opposition to these opinions, it will be shown that the covenant comprehends both temporal and spiritual blessings.

I. IT COMPREHENDS SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS.

The first argument in support of this position, we derive from the grand covenant-promise. What is this promise? That God will be a God to Abraham and to his seed. How comprehensive! How glorious! Can one more comprehensive and glorious be found in any part of the inspired

volume? How similar to that recorded in the epistle to the Hebrews! “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, after those days, saith the Lord: I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and *I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.*”* Do not the very terms in which this grand promise to Abraham is expressed, constrain us, by their natural force, to conclude, that it must have respect to blessings far more important than temporal favours? If God had designed by his covenant to secure to him and to his seed nothing more than the possession of Canaan, and external privileges not enjoyed by other nations, would he have expressed his engagements in terms of the sublimest import? “To be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee!” This includes every thing. A promise more comprehensive cannot be formed into words. On the supposition that God intended to make the engagement, which we contend he did, terms more suitable, more expressive, more ample, could not have been selected.

In opposition to this reasoning, it may be said, the promise is not to be understood in its full and natural import. No sufficient reason, however, can be assigned for this limitation. Neither the context, nor the state of the patriarch, will furnish

* Ch. viii. 10.

one. On the contrary, both unite in supporting our construction. Consider the manner in which this wonderful transaction is introduced. To animate the faith, and raise the expectations of Abraham, it is preceded by an assurance very similar to that which preceded the commission and promise given by our blessed Lord to his apostles, when he appointed them ambassadors of peace, and heralds of life and salvation to a guilty and rebellious world. “*And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I AM THE ALMIGHTY GOD.*”* Now, if God had intended, by this covenant, merely to engage to take Abraham and his seed into an external relation, and to bestow on them only temporal blessings, would he have introduced the transaction by proclaiming his most glorious title?

Consider also the patriarch’s religious state, when the covenant was established. He was a true believer, reconciled to God by the blood of atonement. There was nothing, then, in his condition to lead him to interpret the promise, as it respected himself, differently from the full and natural import of the terms in which it was conveyed.

If this promise did not, we ask, Where is the promise given to Abraham which did, include spiritual blessings? Search the sacred volume,

* Mat. xxviii. 18—20. Gen. xvii. 1.

and you will not find one expressed in terms more obvious in meaning, or more comprehensive in extent. While those gracious engagements of the Most High which preceded, with the exception of one, in Gen. xv. 18. relating only to the land of Canaan, are delivered in the simple form of a promise; this is delivered, with peculiar solemnity, in the form of a covenant, confirmed by a visible and standing token. Let it be considered too, that, in this ever memorable transaction, Jehovah assumed, for the *first time*, the delightful covenant-title of being a God to his people. Never before did he publish to his church that all-cheering promise: "I will be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee." If, on such an occasion, we must fritter away this sublime promise into a mere engagement to confer on Abraham and his descendants a few distinguishing favours which perish in the using; if we must explain away the condescension and grace of Jehovah, so as to leave in this glorious covenant-title nothing more than the character of a political sovereign of the patriarch's posterity: I ask, when shall we receive this promise as conveying to the church those treasures of grace and glory which it assuredly comprehends? and when shall we consider this title as constituting that relation to his people, which emboldens them to call him, *Abba, Father*; and say to others, "*This God is our God forever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death?*"

Placed in circumstances so peculiar, how could Abraham do otherwise than understand the promise according to the natural import of the terms in which it was delivered? Did he receive other promises as comprehending spiritual blessings? and could he contract this most glorious promise so as to exclude them, and view the covenant as relating merely to temporal matters? It cannot be. The believing patriarch doubtless beheld in it a treasure, for himself and for his posterity, infinitely richer than a land flowing with milk and honey, and all its attendant blessings of a worldly nature.

Had not this covenant respected spiritual benefits, Jehovah would not have assumed in it the title of being the God of Abraham and his seed; for the import of it is too glorious to belong to any covenant regarding things merely temporal. An apostle has clearly determined this point, in his epistle to the Hebrews; where, speaking of the patriarchs, he affirms, that because God hath prepared for them a heavenly city he is not ashamed to be called their God:* plainly implying that, if God had not by the covenant dignified with this style, provided for them more than temporal favours, he would not have used it.

To anticipate an objection, it may be proper to observe, that God styled himself the God of the Hebrews in reference rather to this than to the

* Heb. xi. 16.

Sinai-covenant. Long before the formation of the latter, he had, by the former, engaged to be their God. Hence, when he came to effect their emancipation from Egyptian bondage, he called them his *people*, and himself their *God*: “And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt. And thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, *The LORD God of the Hebrews* hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD *our God*.”*

In fact, the covenant of Sinai was subsequent to that of the patriarch:† and as it comprehended only temporal blessings, the text referred to in the epistle to the Hebrews, authorizes us to conclude, that it would not have comported with the dignity of Jehovah to have formed a national covenant with Israel, and to have styled himself their God; but on the ground of its connexion with, and subserviency to, the covenant made with their fathers, comprehending spiritual blessings.‡

There are various passages of sacred scripture, which prove clearly, that the covenant of Abraham included spiritual blessings. The first to be cited, in addition to the one already adduced, is that remarkable text, containing our Lord’s reply

* Exod. iii. 7. 18. † Deut. xxix. 13, 25. ‡ Compare Levit. xxvi

12, with 2 Cor. vi. 16.

to a question proposed by the Sadducees; in which he infers the resurrection of the body from the grand title which God assumed in this covenant. “*As touching the dead that they rise; have you not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living; ye therefore do greatly err.*”* When Jehovah spake to Moses out of the bush, the patriarchs were sleeping in their graves; and, therefore, as he then styled himself *their God*, it was certain, in our Saviour’s judgment, that their souls were living: and, inasmuch as the covenant-relation subsisted between God and their whole nature, it follows, from the same title, that their bodies must be raised from the dead, to share with their immortal spirits in divine favours. Now, it is evident, from the chapter recording the conversation between the Almighty and his servant Moses, that reference is had to Abraham’s covenant, in which God, for the first time, assumed this glorious name: and, therefore, if it secured to the patriarchs a happy immortality, and a future resurrection from the dead, it follows incontrovertibly, that this covenant included spiritual, as well as temporal blessings.

The next passage which I submit to your con-

* Mark xii, 26, 27.

sideration, is recorded in the fourth chapter of the epistle to the Romans. Speaking of Abraham, the apostle says, “ *He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE FAITH which he had being yet uncircumcised; that he might be the FATHER OF ALL THEM THAT BELIEVE, though they be not circumcised; that RIGHTEOUSNESS MIGHT BE IMPUTED UNTO THEM ALSO; and the father of the circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had, being yet uncircumcised.*”

From this passage it is proposed to prove, that Abraham was constituted father of all believers, by the covenant under examination; and from this fact to infer, that the covenant must necessarily comprise spiritual blessings. Two things are certain: 1. Abraham was constituted father of the faithful, whether Jewish or Christian: for he received circumcision, as the text states, that he might sustain a paternal relation to them. 2. He is a father to them in a sense in which no other man is so denominated. This is evident from the uniform tenor of sacred scripture. Neither Isaac, nor Jacob, his immediate descendants, nor any other person, how distinguished soever for piety, is ever styled, by an inspired writer, the *father of believers*. This is an honour belonging exclusively to Abraham.

We ask, therefore, what constituted the patri-

arch the father of the faithful? How was his paternal relation to believers established? What is the proper ground on which it is founded? It is usual to style a person eminent for any particular quality, father of those who imitate him in this quality: and, hence, it has been commonly observed, that as Abraham was eminent for his faith, so he became, on this ground, the father of all believers, inasmuch as he is a model of faith to all generations. But this cannot be the true reason of the appellation: because, if it be taken in this sense; if Abraham's faith made him the father of the faithful; then the honour is not confined exclusively to him. Enoch and Noah, Moses and David, and a long list of others, were eminent for the strength of their faith, and are exhibited, in holy scripture, as models of this grace; and may, therefore, be denominated, for the same reason, fathers of all believers.

How, then, the question recurs, did the patriarch become, in an exclusive sense, the father of believers? We answer, By the appointment of God: who gave him circumcision as a token of that signal honour conferred on him; just as a seal royal is given as a token of an honorary title conferred by a prince on one of his subjects. "He received," says Paul, "the sign of circumcision, a *seal* of the righteousness of the faith which he had being yet uncircumcised," for this express purpose, "*that he might be the father of all them that believe:*"

plainly importing, that he received his title and circumcision from God as a matter of free donation; and the latter to certify him, that he should sustain a paternal relation to the whole church. The patriarch's faith may have been the reason why it pleased Jehovah to put on him so great an honour. It ought, however, to be observed, that the covenant which constituted him father of all believers, was made with him many years before that illustrious act of faith, which he exhibited in the intended sacrifice of his son Isaac; and even before that act of faith, which the apostle celebrates in the fourth chapter of the epistle to the Romans:* and, indeed, he was *virtually* made, though not *formally* constituted such, previously to the display of any very remarkable evidence of this grace. (See Gen. xii. 3.) But, admitting that he received this honorary title as a reward of his faith, still his faith was not the proper ground on which it rested; because, if God had not constituted him the father of believers, his faith, how great soever, could not have made him such. To reward a subject for some signal exploit, his prince confers upon him a title of nobility. Now, it is evident that, although this exploit operates, in the royal mind, as an inducement to bestow the reward, yet it is the prince's act, and not the subject's exploit, which makes him a nobleman; and, to prove his right to rank among the

* Comp. Rom. iv. 19, with Gen. xviii. 11—15, and both with Gen. xvii. 1.

nobility of his country, he must produce the royal grant. Thus stands the matter with respect to Abraham. The act, the donation of Jehovah, made him the father of believers; although he may have received the ennobling title as a gracious reward of his faith.

Now, if it can be proved, that Abraham was constituted father of the faithful, by the *covenant* under examination, it will follow conclusively that this covenant must comprehend spiritual blessings. Of this fact, there is evidence sufficient to place it beyond any reasonable doubt: for mention is made of this very title in the record of the covenant; not, indeed, in the same, yet in terms equivalent in meaning: "*Neither shall thy name any more be called ABRAM; but thy name shall be called ABRAHAM: for a FATHER OF MANY NATIONS have I made thee.*"* This promise, we admit, may have some reference to the nations that sprung from the patriarch's loins. But it is to be observed, Abraham was not the natural father of *many nations*: and, therefore, the promise must be considered as looking beyond his natural descendants, and as having a special reference to his numerous, spiritual seed, true believers of every age and nation under heaven. This is no conjecture: it is truth, sanctioned by apostolic authority. For Paul thus

* Gen. xvii. 5.

interprets the language of the covenant. In illustrating and confirming the very argument to which the text (Rom. iv. 11, 12.) belongs, he subjoins, as a proof of his assertion that Abraham "is the father of us all," these very words of the covenant: "As it is written, I HAVE MADE THEE A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS."* This settles the matter. Apostolic authority has determined the honorary title given in the covenant to Abraham, to have special reference to his spiritual seed, true believers of all nations; and "*father of all them that believe,*" and "*father of many nations,*" to be phrases so far equivalent, that the latter includes the former.†

The fact is now established. Abraham was constituted father of the faithful, by the covenant under examination. From this fact, it follows, that the covenant must contain spiritual blessings: for with what propriety could the patriarch be constituted father of *Gentile-believers* in a covenant which did not comprehend spiritual blessings?

This truth receives additional evidence, when we reflect for what purpose Abraham was constituted father of believers. It was not merely to exhibit him as a model of faith, but that he might

* Rom. xiv. 7.

† *Includes;* because the one, as it has respect to Abraham's carnal seed as well as to believers, is more comprehensive than the other.

transmit to them the benefits of covenant-grace; just as a natural father transmits an inheritance to his children. Human law secures to children the property of their parents: so the divine constitution or covenant secures to all believers the blessings of their father Abraham. This interpretation evidently coincides with the language of an inspired writer: "Know ye, therefore, that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scriptures, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then, they which be of faith, are blessed with faithful Abraham."* "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

By these texts, the following points are plainly established: *Believers receive blessings from God, considered as the CHILDREN of Abraham.* They are expressly called his children: and it is promised that all nations shall be blessed in him; that is, by being united to his family, and brought under the operation of his covenant.—*Believers enjoy the same blessings which their covenant-father enjoyed: they "are blessed with faithful Abraham."*

* Gal. iii. 7—9. 14.

Believers inherit from him, as their covenant-father, SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS; such as justification by faith, and the gift of the Spirit, which are expressly mentioned in these quotations. Can a doubt, then, remain, that Abraham was, by this covenant, appointed their father, for the great purpose of transmitting the blessings of grace and glory to all who by faith become members of his family?

If additional evidence be required to support this point, and to show that such is the real, scriptural import of the patriarch's honorary title; I refer you again to the particular text under investigation. There, you will find the inspired writer specifies the purpose for which Abraham was constituted "*father of all them that believe.*" What was it? It follows: **THAT RIGHTEOUSNESS MIGHT BE IMPUTED UNTO THEM ALSO:**" in other words, that he, as the head of his family, might transmit to all its members, the great blessing of justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ, received by faith; and consequently all other spiritual blessings, because they are inseparably connected with this fundamental one. Every justified believer is undoubtedly sanctified, and adopted, and a partaker of all saving benefits.

This matter may be illustrated by recurring to a comparison already used. A title of nobility is conferred on a subject. By virtue of the royal grant, he becomes the head of a noble family; and

as such transmits, according to the tenor of his grant, a title and all the privileges connected with it, to his heirs in their several generations. In like manner, Abraham was ennobled by the King of kings; and, by virtue of his royal grant, or covenant, constituting him father of all believers, he transmits to them, his appointed heirs, the blessings comprehended in the covenant.

Let us collect the result of the explanation given of this important passage. It appears,

1. That Abraham was constituted father of believers by the covenant under examination.

2. That he, as their covenant-father, transmits to them the benefits of this covenant; and

3. That believers, as his heirs appointed by this covenant, receive spiritual blessings; particularly justification by faith, and the gift of the Spirit.

From these premises, we draw it as an incontestable conclusion, *That this covenant must contain SPIRITUAL BENEFITS.*

The light which has now been thrown on this text, will enable us to see the precise manner in which circumcision operated as a seal of the righteousness of faith, in respect to Abraham. Many admit the truth, who do not seem to understand it. Circumcision was given to the patriarch, as an appointed token or seal of the covenant; and as such it was received by him. It was, therefore, to him

a confirmation of all its engagements; and, as the covenant contained spiritual blessings, and among them stood preeminently justification by faith, circumcision was of course a seal of this fundamental benefit. It certified Abraham that, according to covenant-promise, he should be justified by that righteousness which he had already received by faith.

I finish this branch of the subject, by showing that this covenant, as already intimated, contains not only some, but all spiritual blessings; and that, from its nature, it must necessarily have respect to Christ, our Redeemer. It has been distinctly proved, that the righteousness of faith, and the gift of the Spirit, or, in other words, justification and sanctification, together with a glorious resurrection from the dead, belong to it; blessings inseparably connected with all others of a spiritual nature. Besides, the grand promise of this covenant is expressed in terms the most comprehensive; which taken, as we have seen they ought to be, according to their natural import, must comprehend all spiritual blessings. "I will be their God:" this secures, to every believing son and daughter of Abraham, pardon, reconciliation, peace, renovation, growth and perseverance in grace, protection against every enemy, victory over death, admission into heaven, resurrection from the dead, and life eternal. We may, there-

fore, consider every subsequent promise given by Jehovah to his people, and recorded in sacred scripture, as intended to develop this grand covenant promise, virtually including all other promises; and to teach them more distinctly what they may, and ought to, expect from his grace and munificence, who has condescended to engage to be a God unto them.

This covenant must likewise have respect to Christ; because, only through his mediation, can Jehovah become a God to any of our apostate race. The grand promise of it was founded on the previous promise of a Saviour; and the fulfilment of the one depended on the fulfilment of the other. Had not a Saviour been promised, the Supreme Being could not have engaged, consistently with his glory, to be a God to sinful mortals: and had not Christ made the necessary expiation for sin, covenant-blessings would not have been bestowed on them. Such is the doctrine of an inspired apostle: "Now I say, that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers. And for this cause, he is mediator of the New Testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance:"* And, in his

* Rom. xv. 8. Heb. ix. 15.

epistle to the Galatians, the same apostle, speaking of this very covenant, tells us expressly, that it "*was confirmed of God in (with respect to) Christ.*"* By believing in the Saviour, his promised seed, Abraham was justified, and obtained the other blessings of the covenant: and the fulfilment of its gracious engagements, is secured to all his spiritual seed by faith in the same Redeemer.

There are several other passages, bearing on the point in hand, which prove the Abrahamic covenant to include spiritual blessings; but the limits assigned to this discussion, will not allow the introduction of them. Nor is it necessary: the truth we contend for may be confidently rested on the texts submitted to your consideration.

II. THE COVENANT OF ABRAHAM CONTAINS TEMPORAL OR EXTERNAL BLESSINGS. This is the second truth, which we oppose to the second error:

No writer, as far as I know, denies that this covenant did, at its original formation, include benefits of such a nature. All admit the promises relative to Canaan, and the birth of Messiah, to have been external blessings. Still, however, some contend, that, since our Saviour's incarnation, engagements of this kind being fulfilled, the covenant has no respect to temporal, and contemplates only spiritual, benefits. This opinion we believe to be unscriptural. The promise relative

to the birth of our Redeemer has, indeed, been accomplished; and consequently, the Jewish people are no longer a consecrated vehicle for introducing him into the world. But, has the donation of Canaan been revoked? Was the right to this land, invested, by the promise of Jehovah, in the descendants of Abraham, to expire at a particular period? We contend that it was not. The promise is part of an everlasting covenant. Perhaps it will be said, that, by dispossessing them of their inheritance, God has, by an act of his providence, plainly intimated the duration of his grant. True it is, they have been driven from that goodly land; but are we not taught to regard this as a judgment for their sins, which will be removed when they shall return to the Lord? They were once before dispossessed of their country, and carried away captives to Babylon; and yet, after having worn out a servitude of seventy years, in a strange land, they were restored to their inheritance: and why may we not conclude that they will, on their repentance, be again collected and brought back to the land of their fathers? Their present existence as a separate people evidently favours this expectation. Indeed, the prophets of God have clearly foretold, not only the conversion of the Jews to the Christian faith, but also their restoration, as a people, to their ancient country. This opinion is embraced by many able expositors of sacred

prophecy: and, were we now to enter on the discussion, numerous, plain, and decisive predictions might be adduced in support of it.

But dismissing, for the present, this subject with these few observations, we intend to show, that all external blessings bestowed on the patriarch's descendants, came as the fruits of this covenant. Did the Almighty display his marvellous works in Egypt, and, by his mighty arm, effect their emancipation from cruel bondage? Did he lead them through the Red Sea, feed them with manna forty years in the wilderness, and at last conduct them to a land flowing with milk and honey? These miraculous interpositions of his providence, were granted in fulfilment of his covenant with Abraham and his seed. Did Jehovah condescend to enter into covenant with them as a nation? Moses derives the reason of the memorable transaction at Sinai, from this covenant: "*That he may establish thee to-day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.*"* Did the Most High become their king? It was to carry into effect his covenant. Having by their emancipation made them a separate and independent people, a civil government became necessary: and, for the more effectual accomplish-

* Deut. xxix. 13, 25

ment of covenant-engagements, God saw it best, not to leave them to the sagacity of human prudence, but to give them a system of political laws, emanating from his own wisdom. Did Jehovah make them the depository of his heavenly oracles, and send them prophet after prophet for their instruction? It was doubtless to establish his covenant with them, and that he might become, in the sublimest sense of the word, a God to his chosen. The divine oracles were the great external benefit included in this covenant. When Paul asks the question, "what profit is there of circumcision?" that is, what profit in being a Jew, a descendant of Abraham, wearing in the flesh the token of God's covenant? what is his reply? Does he say, the Jews possess the promised land; they are governed by civil laws enacted by Heaven? These were indeed temporal favours of great value, which God had bestowed on them. But they enjoyed blessings of a temporal nature unspeakably more valuable: they had in their possession the sacred scriptures, given to make them wise unto salvation: and, therefore, Paul replies to his question, "*Much every way; chiefly because that unto them were committed the ORACLES OF GOD. For what if some did not believe, shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar.*"*

* Rom. iii. 1—3. .

Here are two permanent, external benefits of Abraham's covenant. Some of the other favours of this kind, mentioned as flowing from it, have passed away: but the donation of the sacred scriptures, and the gift of authorized teachers of divine truth, are as lasting as time, and will be enjoyed by the church as long as the world stands.



LETTER III.

General observations—Great design of the covenant.

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN,

IN my last letter, it was proved that the covenant made with Abraham, comprehends in its engagements both spiritual and external blessings. With a view more fully to illustrate its meaning, and bring into clearer light its precious contents, permit me, in this, to direct your attention to a few additional observations.

1. With respect to Abraham personally, the grand promise of the covenant is to be understood in its sublimest import. God engaged to be unto him a God, in the most glorious sense. This has already been proved.

2. By this covenant, Jehovah stipulated to become, in the same glorious sense of his promise, a God unto all those of Abraham's seed, who should imitate his faith, and walk in his steps. So obviously this appears from the preceding discussion, that no further confirmation is needed.

3. The covenant did not insure the conversion of all the descendants of Abraham. It was indeed made with, and the promises of grace were exhibited to, all duly circumcised Israelites: but by no means does it follow, from this fact, that God engaged to bestow his converting grace on them all. The covenant did not contain a promise so absolute and universal. Events have made this certain. Thousands of Abraham's seed, in every age, wore the covenant-token in their flesh, who never derived from their relation to God any saving benefit, but lived and died in impenitence and unbelief: and, from this fact, we may, with certainty, conclude that, although the offers of grace were made to all, and all enjoyed the instructions of inspired and other divinely appointed teachers; yet God did not bind himself, by an absolute promise, to give to all a new heart and a new spirit. A si-

milar fact occurs under the gospel-dispensation. The grant of eternal life is, *in offer*, made to all who hear the glad tidings; yet how many thousands reject the offer, and, by their unbelief, denying the truth, the infallible testimony of God, bring upon themselves an aggravated condemnation? “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God, hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God *hath given to us eternal life*; and this life is in his Son.” But

4. The covenant did engage, *that salvation should be transmitted SEMINALLY; and that, in every age, there should be, among the Israelites, an election of grace.* It has been asserted, that the carnal seed of Abraham were set apart to God, and circumcised as his peculiar people, to introduce into the world the Redeemer, who received his human nature from them; and that, having answered this purpose, they had no longer, by birth, an interest in this covenant, and were no longer God’s peculiar people. In opposition to this opinion, it can, I think, be clearly shown, that the carnal seed of Abraham were consecrated and circumcised for another and more lasting purpose; name-

ly, to be a *nursery to the invisible church*: and that God did engage his true spiritual church, consisting of real believers, should descend, in the line of Abraham's natural and adopted seed, down to the end of time. In the present stage of discussion, it will suffice to prove this truth with respect to the patriarch's descendants, till the commencement of the Christian dispensation.

Here, my brethren, we enter on an important point: and I beg your close attention to the evidence that shall be offered to establish it.

1. The transmission of saving blessings to Abraham's believing seed, appears clearly to have been, so far as human interest is concerned, the covenant's ultimate end, from this consideration that it comprehended such blessings. The immediate effect of this divine constitution, was the regular organization of God's visible church in the patriarch's family: and, as long as his natural posterity retained their covenant-relation to their God, it perpetuated it among them. When the perpetuity of the covenant, and the interest of Gentile-christians in it, shall have been evinced, it will be also apparent, that this same divine constitution perpetuates the visible church among Abraham's adopted seed, till the end of time. This establishment and propagation of the visible church, *seminally*, was, no doubt, one important design of the patriarch's covenant. Let it be re-

collected, however, that the visible church has been formed for gathering in the elect of God, and is used as a means for promoting the interest of the invisible church; and it will be evident that this covenant contemplated a higher and nobler purpose, than the establishment, on earth, of a society bearing certain peculiar relations to God of an external nature. It comprehends, we have seen, both temporal and spiritual blessings; and, hence, the conclusion seems certain, that its great design must be the bestowment of the latter benefits upon the seed of Abraham: the donation of the former being made in due subserviency. Christianity is conducive to our present, as well as to our future welfare: for, says an inspired writer, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." But would it not be deemed utterly inconclusive, were the great design of our holy religion asserted, on the ground of this text, to be the happiness of man in his present state? We derive its great design from a view of its most important blessings: and, as it secures to every true believer everlasting salvation, we have no hesitation in concluding, that its chief purpose and its ultimate end, with respect to man's interest, is to save his soul, and make him happy in a future world. For the same reason, we determine the end of Abraham's covenant to have been the transmission of

spiritual benefits to the elect of God, in the line of his natural posterity.

The manner of expression used in the covenant, confirms this conclusion. "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, *in their generations*, for an everlasting covenant;" for what purpose? "*to be a God unto thee, and to thy SEED after thee.*"* Here the covenant's great design is manifestly declared. It is nothing less, than the bestowment of all spiritual and saving blessings comprehended in the promise, on Abraham and his *seed*; not all, but as many as the Lord should call. If, by this divine assurance, no more were meant than, as some contend, that Jehovah would take them into a near special external relation to himself, and put them in possession of a goodly land, together with many other temporal blessings; it would certainly follow, the covenant had no higher end in view. But his promise means vastly more, and engages that he will be, to the patriarch, and to all his believing seed, *a God*, in the most glorious sense of the covenant-title. And hence, it appears evident, this covenant contemplated, as its great end, the bestowment of spiritual blessings, life and salvation, on Abraham and on his spiritual seed, found among his natural descendants, with whom the covenant was made, and to whom the promise was directed.

* Gen. xvii. 7.

2. The sacred oracles were delivered to the posterity of Abraham. This fact constitutes a second proof, that the covenant made with him engaged to perpetuate the true church, and transmit saving blessings, in the line of his natural seed. None will pretend these inspired writings were put into their hands, merely to confer on them some temporal advantages. They were doubtless given to them for the same purpose, for which they have been given to us; namely, to lead them to the knowledge, love, and service of the true God; and that as many as were ordained to eternal life might, by faith in their promised Saviour, obtain it. Now, the gift of the holy scriptures was a fruit of this covenant; the chief external advantage which a Jew, a circumcised descendant of Abraham, enjoyed above others:* and, therefore, it follows, the covenant engaged, that salvation should be transmitted among them from one generation to another; because this effect actually resulted from the donation of the holy scriptures, which was made in fulfilment of covenant-promise.

3. The promises of converting and saving grace in the Old Testament, furnish another argument in favour of the truth for which we contend. That this part of our sacred volume contains such promises, cannot be denied by any acquainted with those heavenly records: nor can it be denied, that

* Rom. iii. 1—3.

they were directed to Abraham's natural seed. See Acts ii. 39. These promises did not, it must be admitted, engage to effect the conversion of all to whom they were exhibited. They pertained to the visible church in general: and God fulfilled them to individuals according to his own sovereign pleasure. But the donation of them certainly secured an election of grace, and the preservation of God's spiritual church, among Abraham's descendants, till, by unbelief, they forfeited their distinguishing privileges. "SALVATION," said Jesus to the woman of Samaria, "*is of the Jews.*"* This, then, must have been the original and great design of the patriarchal covenant; because these gracious promises, being a part of the sacred oracles, one of its capital fruits, were given to carry it into effect, and, as we have seen, to develop more fully the meaning of its primary promise, in which all subsequent promises were virtually comprised.

The reasoning of St. Paul, in the 9th and 11th chapters of his epistle to the Romans, strongly corroborates this interpretation of Jehovah's design in the covenant made with his servant Abraham. He asserts explicitly that the promises pertained to Israel: and, from the train of his argument, it is evident he allows that divine faithfulness to these promises, and to the covenant in which they were originally comprehended, demanded their

* John iv. 22.

fulfilment in the conversion of some of that people to whom they were given. The deplorable state of his “kinsmen according to the flesh,” excited in the apostle’s benevolent soul the tenderest compassion; and he begins his ninth chapter, with expressing the continual sorrow which oppressed his heart on their account. Having mentioned the distinguishing privileges with which they had been favoured, he proceeds to vindicate the faithfulness of God to his promises and covenant, against an objection grounded on their seeming want of fulfilment. “Are not this people, it might be said, Israelites to whom pertain the promises, and the seed of Abraham to whom Jehovah engaged, by covenant, to be their God? How, then, is their present state reconcilable with divine faithfulness? Or, is it possible that they should, as intimated, forfeit their privileges, and be cast out of the church? Has ‘the word of God taken none effect?’ Has its promises failed to be fulfilled?”

This is the objection, which Paul anticipates and refutes. How does he answer it? By denying the promises to belong to the Israelites, or that God had, in his covenant with Abraham, engaged to bestow on his seed saving blessings? No: admitting both as facts, he removes the apparent difficulty, by stating a grand *distinction* in regard to the patriarch’s natural descendants, which, he shows, from the scriptures, God had very early

intimated to his church, would ever prevail. Read his own words: "Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all," *the true* "Israel which are of Israel: neither because they are the *seed* of Abraham are they ALL children: but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called; that is, they which are the children of the flesh, these are not" *all, and merely on that account*, "the children of God. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son. And not only this, but when Rebecca had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac, (for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to *election* might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth,) it was said, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." Here the sacred writer clearly teaches us, that mere descent from Jacob, and mere connexion with the church to which the promises were given, did not make his children true, spiritual Israelites: and that, although they derived their descent from Abraham, and were by birth interested in his covenant, yet their saving adoption as the children of God, was not the necessary result. The covenant did not insure the conversion and salvation of all his natural seed: and against such a misconception of his promise, Jehovah had very early guarded the

church, by expelling Ishmael and his offspring, and establishing the covenant with Isaac and his posterity; and afterwards by ejecting Esau from his birth-right, and bestowing it on his brother Jacob. But, at the same time it must be admitted, the apostle does likewise teach us, that the conversion and salvation of a select portion of Abraham's seed was secured by covenant-promise. This evidently appears from the seventh verse: "Neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they *all* children:" clearly admitting that *some* of his seed were *children*. Isaac, and Jacob, and their descendants, were the seed of Abraham. Indeed, the whole train of Paul's argument, and more especially the distinction which he makes, are founded on this truth. The answer which he gives, in his eleventh chapter, to another objection, places it beyond reasonable doubt: "I say then, hath God cast away his" *covenant* "people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the *seed* of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew.—Even so then, at this present time also, there is a remnant according to the election of grace. What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the *election* hath obtained it, and the *rest* were blinded."*

* Chap. xi. 1, 2, 5, 7.

On the whole, from the apostle's reasoning, we are warranted in drawing this conclusion: By his covenant with Abraham, God did not engage to convert and save *all* his natural seed; but he certainly did promise that *some* of them should, by the sovereign application of his grace, become his spiritual children, and participate with their illustrious father in the saving blessings of his covenant: and, therefore, if there had not been found, among his natural seed, a constant succession of true believers, the word of God would have failed to produce its intended effect, and his covenant-promise would not have been fulfilled.

4. Facts prove the position which has been stated. Grace and salvation actually did descend among Abraham's posterity, from generation to generation; till, like Ishmael and Esau, their unbelief and rejection of the Messiah, deprived them of covenant-privileges. Till that mournful event, among them was constantly found the *spiritual* as well as the *visible* church of God. In a few years after the death of Abraham, true religion expired every where except among his descendants. Favoured by repeated communications from heaven, they retained the knowledge and worship of Jehovah, when darkness overshadowed the nations, and idolatry universally prevailed. Often, indeed, ignorance, wickedness, and idolatry, spread very generally among this peculiar

people. Yet, in the worst of times, there were always found among them, at least, a few acquainted with the true God, and attached to his worship in opposition to that of idols: and even in that gloomy period when the defection was so great, that the prophet Elias complained he was left alone on the side of truth and religion, Jehovah, as he was assured, had reserved to himself seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.* Various, indeed, was the aspect of piety. Sometimes it flourished, and at other times it declined. But in every generation, there was, at least, “*a remnant according to the election of grace.*” The true spiritual, as well as the visible, church, was preserved among Abraham’s descendants from age to age, till the calling of the Gentiles.

Here is an unquestionable fact. In what light is it to be contemplated? Has it no connexion with the covenant? Shall we consider it merely as an act of God’s sovereign pleasure? Surely this would not be a correct view of this dispensation toward his church. By a covenant, containing, as has been proved, spiritual and temporal blessings, he had promised to be, in the fullest sense, a God unto Abraham’s seed: and, doubtless, his becoming, by subsequent communications of his grace, a God to them, was a manifest fulfilment of his

* 1 Kings xix. 18. Rom. xi. 4.

covenant-engagement. Sovereign, indeed, is the Supreme Being in dispensing his saving grace. But unquestionably it does not derogate, in the least degree, from his sovereignty, to make a free and gracious promise, and then to fulfil it. He might, had it been his pleasure, have withheld the promise from Abraham, or he might have given it to some other person: but having made it, his veracity was pledged to accomplish it, by perpetuating the church, and transmitting saving blessings among the patriarch's descendants.

Thus, by various arguments, has been established this important truth, *That the Abrahamic covenant was made, not merely for the purpose of ushering the Saviour into the world, but also to transmit, SEMINALLY, spiritual and saving blessings among the patriarch's natural descendants, till, by unbelief, they forfeited those peculiar privileges, which had so long constituted their boast and glory.* For the accomplishment of this great design, they were separated from the world, and impressed with the seal of God's gracious covenant. That "the elect may obtain salvation with eternal glory," is the end contemplated by the gospel. But to attain this end, the gospel is, by divine appointment, preached to all promiscuously: and God, by his sovereign grace, gives it an effectual application to as many as he hath chosen. So, for the accomplishment of the great design of his

covenant, God was pleased to establish it with Abraham's seed generally, and direct the application of its token to them; that its blessings being exhibited to all, he might, by the secret and sovereign operations of his grace, give them an effectual application to his chosen, and bring the children of promise to the actual enjoyment of them. The patriarch's posterity were formed into a visible society, bearing peculiar relations to God; they were made the depositary of his heavenly oracles; to them were sent inspired prophets, and divinely commissioned teachers; to them were directed all the promises of grace recorded in the Old Testament; on them were poured out the sacred influences of the Holy Spirit; and among them were constantly found the saints of God, and the heirs of glory. Such was the effect, and such the design of Abraham's covenant. It constituted his seed into a visible church, to be a nursery both for the invisible church, and for heaven. It drew around them a sacred enclosure, within which Jehovah stipulated to seek and find the election of his grace; and, in every generation, to renew some by his grace, and prepare them for his eternal glory.

From the view which has been given of Abraham's covenant, it manifestly appears, that, correspondent to the two kinds of blessings comprehended in its engagements, it contemplated a *two-*

fold seed: natural and spiritual; children by birth, and children by promise. Both kinds were actually in the covenant; and, consequently, being Jehovah's peculiar people, were authorized to call him their God. It is manifest, however, that the relations which united them to him, though in some respects the same, yet, in others, were widely different. In regard to both, it was a covenant-relation: but, while the one sustained only an external union to God, the other was united to him also by a spiritual union. The natural seed were really members of the visible church, partakers of external covenant-benefits, and invited to accept of its saving blessings. But the spiritual seed actually enjoyed both, and were members of the invisible church: they were renewed by divine grace, sanctified by the Spirit, possessed of the faith of their father Abraham, and, consequently, arrayed in that righteousness by which he was justified. Thus, the ground on which the two descriptions of seed rested their claim to Jehovah as their God, was widely different. To the one, he was a God by a peculiar relation which he did not bear to the rest of mankind: but to the other, he was a God, by a relation still more peculiar; a relation which he did not bear even to the members of his visible church, considered as such.

The distinction now stated pervades the sacred scriptures. It is a key to certain passages, the

meaning of which cannot be opened without it. In a controversy with the Jews, our blessed Lord admits them to be Abraham's *seed*, but denies them to be Abraham's *children*:* meaning that, although they were descended from him by natural generation, yet they were not his children according to the promise, nor imitators of his faith and works. In like manner, St. Paul gives, and refuses to the *same* person, the name of a Jew: "He is not a Jew which is one outwardly; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly:† teaching us that a man may, in one sense, by external relation, be numbered with God's covenant-people, while, in another sense, in regard to spiritual union, he does not belong to them.

This distinction prevailed constantly in the church, during the former economy; and it exists, and *must* exist, under the present dispensation. For it is a fact not to be disputed, that, while true believers sustain to God a spiritual union, and enjoy the saving blessings of his gracious covenant; there are many who, although, on a profession of faith, admitted into the church, and enjoying the covenant-seals, yet, being destitute of real religion, sustain only an external relation to God. The former are the branches in Jesus Christ the vine, which bear fruit, and shall continue to flourish in him: but the latter are the branches, which

* John viii. 37, 39.

† Rom. ii. 28, 29

bear no fruit, and are doomed to be separated from him, and cast into the fire.* In the parable to which we refer, let it be observed, our Saviour allows, in respect to both classes of persons, a *real union* to himself: and this amounts to a plain proof, that the distinction formerly existing between the people of God, the members of his church, has not, as some pretend, been abolished by the Christian dispensation.

LETTER IV.

The covenant perpetual.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

THE first part of our discussion is now completed. It has been proved, I trust to your satisfaction, that the covenant of Abraham comprehends in its engagements both external and spiritual blessings; and that the great design of this divine constitution was, not only to perpetuate among the patriarch's posterity the visible church,

* John xv. 1—6.

but chiefly to transmit SEMINALLY the blessings of salvation, and gather into the invisible church God's elect among that chosen people. You will please to bear in mind these important truths: for, in the course of our investigation, it will be necessary to refer to them frequently.

In this letter, I shall endeavour to establish the PERPETUITY OF THE PATRIARCHAL COVENANT. This gracious constitution was intended by its glorious author, not merely to answer temporary purposes, and last while the Mosaic economy continued; but to endure as long as the sun and moon, and bless his church with heavenly influence, till he translate her from earth to heaven. We demonstrate this property of the covenant, by the following arguments.

1. The covenant is expressly called *everlasting*: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an *everlasting* covenant."* This term, it is admitted, has sometimes a more limited sense, and is connected with things which last only for several ages. It is applied to the priesthood of Aaron, and to the great annual atonement made for the Jewish people; both which have long since been abolished. But it will not follow, from this application of the term, in these two instances, and in others of a similar kind, that it should be understood in the same limited sense in its ap-

* Gen. xvii 7.

plication to the Abrahamic covenant. It certainly is applied to objects as lasting as time, and to objects absolutely eternal. We read of the everlasting hills, the everlasting mountains, the everlasting remembrance of the righteous, everlasting life, everlasting kindness, the everlasting God. Why then should we not understand this term, in its application to the covenant, as expressing perpetuity? What just reason can be assigned for taking it in a more limited sense? Will it be said, the term is applied to the land of promise, from which the descendants of Abraham have, for ages, been expelled; and that, therefore, the covenant ought not to be considered as being perpetual, any more than the possession of Canaan? We reply, Before a solid objection can be founded on this application of the term, it behooves those who urge it to prove, that the Jewish people shall never return to their ancient land, and occupy again the inheritance from which, on account of their crimes, they have been ejected. Their expulsion from it no more proves the grant to have terminated, at that dreadful period when they became vagabonds over the earth, than their former exile, under the Babylonish captivity, proved the term of donation to be then expired; unless it can be clearly evinced, that they shall never return to their own country. Can this be done? On what grounds shall the reasoning proceed? Can satisfactory proof be derived from the present state of

that unhappy people? They are indeed like dry bones. But the same Almighty power, which made them live when they themselves thought deliverance impossible, and that there was no more hope of their being reorganized into a nation in their own land, than of bones, dry and bleached with the sun, being raised to life again; can, with perfect ease, breathe on them, and cause them to live; collect them out of all the countries whither they have been driven, and reestablish them in the country of their forefathers, in greater power and glory than ever. Indeed their present state renders it probable, that the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, their illustrious progenitors, pitying their miseries, will at length redeem them out of the hands of all their enemies. For what purpose have they been, so many ages, preserved, amid innumerable hardships, a separate people? No other nation in similar circumstances, ever retained their distinctive character. All captives have, sooner or later, lost the marks which distinguished them, and become incorporated with their conquerors. But the Jews, notwithstanding all attempts by Christian nations to destroy them as a people, have, in spite of the greatest and most cruel severity employed to subdue them, retained their distinct character, sentiments, and worship. How visible the finger of Jehovah in this phenomenon! For what purpose this unusual interposition? Why has God, by his

providence, preserved them as a separate people? Only to render their future conversion the more conspicuous and remarkable, and then to amalgamate them with other Christian nations? Or is it his intention to restore them to their former inheritance, as well as to convert them to the faith of Christ? If we consult the history of this wonderful people, and the marvellous deliverances effected for them in times past, there appears nothing incredible in an expectation of their return to their own land. The preservation of them as a distinct people, evidently encourages it.

But we have more than probability. Scripture prophecy makes their return certain. A careful inspection of the writings of their prophets should, I think, remove from our minds every doubt on this subject, and convince us, that Jehovah has pledged his omnipotence for their future reestablishment in the land of their fathers. Permit me to direct your attention to a few prophecies, which cannot be easily understood in any other sense than as certifying this event. Moses, after giving an accurate description of the miseries which have befallen his people; their overthrow by the Romans, the destruction of Jerusalem, and their dispersion among all nations;* proceeds to foretell their return, in the following plain words: “ And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the

* Deut. 28, particularly from the forty-fifth verse.

curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call *them* to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; that then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee. If *any* of thine be driven out unto the outmost *parts* of heaven, from thence will the LORD thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee: and the LORD thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers.* Speaking of the latter day, Isaiah predicts the return of the Jews to their own land as constituting one part of its glory: "And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the LORD shall set his hand again the *second time* to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from

* Deut. xxx. 1—6.

the four corners of the earth." See Isaiah xi. 10—16. See also Ezek. xi. 16—20. Many other quotations might be added; but these few, so plain and express, are sufficient to establish the truth, that the future return of the Jews to their own land, is an event to which we may look forward with full confidence; and, consequently, that the covenant-grant of Canaan to them is perpetual.

2. The nature of the blessings promised in this covenant, present us with another proof of its perpetuity. The chief of them, we have seen, are spiritual; and the covenant's great design is, that God might become the God of his elect among the seed of Abraham, by bestowing on them the righteousness of faith, and what is inseparably connected with it, complete salvation. Now, what reason can be assigned for the abolition of a covenant formed for such a purpose, and comprehending such blessings? Surely, the present dispensation is not too spiritual to admit its continued operation. Were the blessings of righteousness and salvation no longer given to the church, we might infer that the covenant was abrogated. But, seeing these blessings come, as the scriptures foresaw and predicted, upon the Gentiles,* what reason can any have to assert, that the covenant, which formerly secured them to believers, has been annulled? This is contending against plain matter of fact.

* Gal. iii. 8, 9.

3. In favour of the perpetuity of Abraham's covenant, the express decision of an inspired apostle may be produced. "Brethren, I speak after the manner of men; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, *that* the covenant, that 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."* On this passage and its context, I make the following remarks:

1. The apostle asserts and proves, that the covenant made with Abraham was not annulled, by the giving of the law at Mount Sinai.

2. He makes an evident and great distinction between the law and the Abrahamic covenant; inasmuch as he asserts that the law could not give that life and righteousness, which were the proper fruits of the promises or covenant. See ver. 21, 22.

3. He teaches us, that the law was given, not to make void, but to subserve the accomplishment of the promise or covenant. See verses 21—23.

4. A necessary consequence of this fact is, that the abrogation of the law, in its covenant-form, could not annul the Abrahamic covenant, from

* Gal. iii. 15, to the end.

which it was entirely distinct, and which it was intended, not to make void, but to subserve.

5. Now, if it can be proved, that St. Paul speaks of the very covenant of which we are treating, then it will follow that this covenant is perpetual. And need proof be offered in support of so plain a truth? This is the only covenant formally made with the patriarch, to which the apostle can refer; and, as it comprehended spiritual blessings, it certainly had respect to Christ, the procurer of all saving benefits.* An objection, against this interpretation, has been grounded on the number of years which the apostle states to have intervened between the giving of the law and the formation of Abraham's covenant. As the difference of time is somewhat less than four hundred and thirty years, some contend, he cannot mean this covenant. Not to repeat that this is the only covenant made with the patriarch on record, containing spiritual blessings, I reply: they who urge the objection will do well to remark, that the force of the apostle's argument does not depend on the precise number of years, but on the *priority* of the covenant. If, therefore, his argument be correct (which, it is presumed, none will question) on supposing the difference to be four hundred and thirty years, it must be conclusive, although the difference should amount to no more than four hundred, or even a less number. But

* See Letter 2, p. 27.

the fact is, the apostle's computation is accurate. He begins it from the date of the first celebrated promise of this covenant; just as Moses begins his computation of the "sojourning of the children of Israel who dwelt in Egypt,"* not from the time when Jacob and his family went to reside in that country, but from the first calling of Abraham to leave his kindred, and go to a distant land.†

These arguments, my brethren, derived from the term *everlasting* applied to the covenant—from the spiritual nature of its blessings—and from the positive testimony of an inspired apostle, prove, in my apprehension, conclusively the PERPETUITY OF ABRAHAM'S COVENANT.

In opposition to this important truth, it is also contended, that the author of the epistle to the Hebrews proves the abolition of the covenant. See chap. viii. 6—13. But the argument, derived from this text, is built on a grand mistake. It confounds the covenant made with Abraham, and the covenant made with his descendants, in their national character, at mount Sinai: two covenants essentially different, as manifestly appears, not only from a view of their respective natures, but from the plain instructions of an inspired writer, who teaches us carefully to distinguish between the former and the latter which he denominates the law.‡ The sacred writer to the Hebrews has,

* Exod. xii. 40. † See Doddridge's note on Gal. iii. 17. ‡ See page 58.

in the context of his disputed passage, expressed himself so fully, that it is perfectly easy to see which of these two covenants he proves to be abolished. He describes it sufficiently to guard against the mistake on which the objection proceeds: as the covenant which God made with the Israelites, “in the day when he took them by the hand, to lead them out of the land of Egypt;” as the covenant which appointed the Aaronic priesthood, ordained the offering of gifts and sacrifices, erected the tabernacle, and set up that whole system of worship which shadowed forth heavenly things, that is, the blessings and privileges of the gospel-dispensation.* The apostle is evidently speaking of the law or Sinai-covenant. How erroneous, then, to contend, that this passage proves the abrogation of the Abrahamic covenant; a covenant of which it does not, and entirely distinct from that of which it does, treat! As well might it be contended, that it proves the abrogation of Noah’s covenant, which engaged the world should never be again destroyed by a flood.

* Heb. chap. viii. and ix.

LETTER V.

Gentile-believers have an interest in the covenant.

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN,

A TRUTH of great importance will now claim your attention. In this and the next succeeding letter, I shall endeavour to prove, that both GENTILE BELIEVERS AND THEIR CHILDREN HAVE AN INTEREST IN THE COVENANT OF ABRAHAM. The proposition to be demonstrated naturally divides itself into two parts. Our first inquiry shall respect the interest of believers. That they are included in this ever-memorable and gracious covenant, and have a right to its privileges and blessings, can be evinced by plain and conclusive evidence. This point was necessarily anticipated, in explaining a particular text, with a view to prove spiritual blessings to be comprehended in the covenant. But as it is a truth of great importance, I shall endeavour to place it in different lights, and evince it by several distinct arguments.

1. *The first shall be drawn from the continued existence of this covenant.* If Gentile-believers have not an interest in it, then this perpetual covenant has no visible operation. The natural de-

scendants of Abraham, whom it formerly blessed with life and salvation, have been shut out from its heavenly benefits. They are no longer in covenant with the God of their fathers. As Ishmael, by his profane mockery, and Esau, by despising his birth-right; so the Jews have, by unbelief, forfeited their ancient privileges. The language of God's providence has, *for ages*, been, "*Ye are not my people.*" From their apostasy, they will certainly be recovered: for it is written, "There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob."* But what becomes of this perpetual covenant in the mean time? If Gentile-believers have no interest in it, a suspension of its visible operation must have taken place soon after the expulsion of the Jewish people, and must continue until they be restored to their forfeited inheritance.

Is this credible? Who can believe that Abraham's glorious covenant, instituted to perpetuate the church of God in the world; visibly operating among his descendants for so many ages; and imparting to circumcised believers the blessings of righteousness, life, and salvation; has been entirely suspended, as to any visible operation, by Jewish unbelief, for almost one thousand eight hundred years? Surely this covenant, which we have seen to be perpetual, cannot thus lie dormant

* Rom. xi. 26.

and inactive. It must, ever since its formation, have been in continual and visible operation; and, since the exclusion of God's ancient people, have imparted to the Christian church light and life, righteousness and salvation. On Gentiles has descended, Paul teaches, the blessing of Abraham, through Jesus Christ; even the promise of the Spirit, through faith; the Spirit, that divine source of all spiritual light, and gracious influence. Comp. Gal. iii. 14 with 15.

2. *The unity of the Jewish and Christian churches, secures to Gentile-believers an interest in this covenant.* In several respects, these churches may be distinguished: they bear different names; they occupy different periods of time; and they flourish under different dispensations. But still they are, in all essential points, the same great religious society; one being a continuation of the other: and their unity is no more affected by these circumstantial differences, than the unity of a nation would be destroyed by a change in its name and government, in some distant period after its first establishment.

Is the Christian church a visible society, bearing a special relation to God, and instituted for the maintenance of his worship? Such was the Jewish church: formed to maintain the worship of the true God, in opposition to that of idols; and so nearly related to him, that he calls "Israel

his first-born son.”* Is the Lord Jesus Christ the head of the Christian church? He was the head of the Jewish church; the angel who conducted her through the wilderness, and whom the Israelites tempted by their rebellious murmurings. The object of their worship, dwelling in the Shechinah between the Cherubim, was Jesus Christ: and, on this account, when he became incarnate, and manifested himself to Israel, it is said of him, “He came to his *own*, and his own received him not.” Is the Christian church a nursery for heaven? Such was the Jewish church; formed, as we have seen, by the covenant established with Abraham, for the great purpose of gathering in the elect of God, and preparing them for glory. The political purposes, answered by the national covenant made at Sinai, were subservient to this higher end. Is the Christian church governed by laws enacted by the Most High? So was the Jewish church. The same glorious gospel, which is preached to us, was preached to the Jews; though more obscurely, by types and sacrifices, and ceremonies and darker promises. The same blessed and holy Spirit, who sheds light, and comfort, and glory on the Christian church, was the source of light and holiness to the Jewish church. The same method of salvation, which is revealed to us, was revealed to the Jews. Abraham, the father of the faithful, and all his spiritual children, un-

* Exod. iv. 22.

der both dispensations, go to heaven in the same way, by faith in the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. In these *essential points*, the two churches agree; and, by this agreement, notwithstanding differences with respect to *unessential matters*, they are constituted *one religious society or church*.

Will it be objected, that the Christian church is composed of Gentiles, and not of the descendants of Abraham? The first members of the church of Christ were Jews: and the fact that the mass of its members have, for ages, been Gentiles, no more destroys its unity with the Jewish church; than the fact, that the Christian church is now composed of nations different from those which were originally the component parts of it, destroys its own unity. The church of Christ is still the same; though she has travelled from east to west, and withdrawn her precious privileges from countries first saluted with the tidings of salvation, and bestowed them on others which were then covered with pagan darkness: and, if she were to retire from the old, and select this new, world as the only place of her abode, she would still be the same church; founded in the death of Christ, cemented by the blood of his apostles, and reared by a long succession of ministering servants, living in different ages, and in different regions of the earth, but animated by the same heavenly Spirit, and pursuing the same glorious end. If such

changes affect not the unity of the Christian church; if, descending through so many ages, and diffusing herself through so many countries, she remains the same holy society; why should it be imagined, that a breach was made in the unity of God's church, by an exchange of the Jewish for the Christian dispensation, and the land of Judea for the world at large.*

* A decisive argument, in favour of the great principle for which we contend, may be derived from the Abrahamic covenant, and pleaded against those who admit believing Gentiles to have an interest in it. In fact, if the Jewish church possessed the attribute of unity; if she was but one religious society; then the Christian church may claim the same attribute, and is the same society continued in the world, under a new dispensation. What constituted the unity of the Jewish church? Not residence in the land of Canaan; for she was the church of God while wandering in the wilderness;† and she remained such even when carried away captive, and her prophets, by the river of Babylon, hanging their harps on the willows, refused to sing the songs of Zion in a strange land. Not the temple-worship at Jerusalem, nor the covenant of Sinai; for she existed long before the erection of the temple, and the memorable transactions at the sacred mount, dwelling in the families of the patriarchs. Not descent from Abraham; for both Ishmael and Esau, together with their posterity, were lineally descended from him, and yet they formed no part of the church of God: and, in subsequent periods, the great mass of his natural seed have been excluded from this holy society; first the ten tribes, and then the remaining tribes, denominated Jews. What then constituted the unity of the Jewish church? Union to one Supreme Head; just as these United States make one nation, by having the same rulers in the general government, and living under the same general constitution. The covenant made with

† Acts vii. 33.

The unity of the church of God appears to be taken for granted by the sacred writers. The figures used by Paul, in illustrating some of his arguments, necessarily imply this important truth. You find one in Gal. iv. 1—7; where he compares the church, under the Jewish and Christian dispensations, to the different states through which an heir passes. He shows that, under the former, she resembled the condition of a minor, who, although proprietor of the whole inheritance, yet is, like a servant, under tutors and governors;* but that, under the latter, she resembles the heir arrived at full age, and put in complete enjoyment of his inheritance.† Now, from this passage, it is evident that the church, composed both of Jews and Gentiles, which has obtained the adoption of

Abraham, constituted the church in his family, and united his seed in subsequent ages into one holy society, under Jehovah, their glorious Lawgiver and Ruler.

Now, if Gentile-believers have an interest in this covenant, it must be a necessary consequence, that this constitution produces, with respect to them, the *same result*, which it did with respect to Abraham's descendants: it must unite them to one head, Jehovah, and into one holy society,—one visible church. And from this acknowledged principle, follows another necessary consequence: namely, that the Christian and Jewish churches are but two parts of the *same whole*, or the *same holy society*, existing in two different periods, and under some diversity of privilege and government: just as the church in the family of the patriarchs, and the church settled in the promised land, though occupying different periods and placed under different regulations, were the same church.

* Verse 3.

† Verse 4, 5.

sons, is the same church which was formerly under bondage to the elements of the world, that is, to the ceremonial law; and that the change of dispensation, which it has undergone, no more affects its unity, than the different states of minority and manhood, through which an heir passes, affect the identity of an individual.

This illustration of Paul constitutes a clear proof of the unity of the church. His comparison assumes it as an acknowledged principle. Deny it, and you destroy the propriety, as well as the force of his figure. For, if the Jewish and Christian churches be, not one, but two, entirely distinct and different from each other, it might be consistent to compare one to the state of a minor, and the other to that of an heir arrived at full age: but it would be highly improper to liken the former, which on this supposition continued under bondage till its dissolution, to an heir passing from his minority and subjection to governors to manhood, and entering on the full possession of his inheritance; and still more improper to represent Gentile-converts as having been in bondage to the ceremonial law. But, admitting this great principle, the figure is correct throughout; and the Galatian believers were properly said to have been in subjection to the law, because they were members of that church which had been in bondage.

Another clear proof of the church's unity, is found in *Ephes. ii. 1—22*. There the apostle re-

presents the Gentiles, formerly “afar off, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise,”* as being “made nigh by the blood of Christ; so that they are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God:”† and as parts of that holy temple, which had for its foundation the *prophets*, as well as the *apostles*; of that church united into one by a common Saviour, “Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.” How was this union between Jew and Gentile effected? by destroying that church of God which had existed many ages, and forming another entirely and essentially different? By no means: it was effected by breaking down “*the middle wall of partition*,” by “abolishing the” cause of “enmity, even the law of commandments, contained in ordinances; by giving the church a new form of government, suited to her enlargement by the conversion of many nations. Gentiles were by faith made citizens of the same commonwealth of Israel, members of the same church, parts of the same household of God, which had existed for ages; and were brought to the enjoyment of the same covenant-privileges, the same promised blessings, though greatly increased, which the church, the Israel of God, had enjoyed before the coming of Christ. All this, I think,

* Verse 12.

† Verse 19.

must appear to any one who examines the passage without prejudice.

We adduce but one more passage of sacred scripture, in support of the unity of the church. It is recorded in Rom. xi. 17—24. In this text, St. Paul compares the church to a good olive-tree, planted in a sacred enclosure, and highly cultivated; the Jews to natural branches, and believing Gentiles to branches taken from a wild olive-tree, and grafted into the good one, so as to partake of its root and fatness. Let it be carefully observed, that the good olive-tree of which the Jews were natural branches, and from which they were, in consequence of unbelief, broken off, is the *very same tree* into which Gentiles were ingrafted; the *very same* into which the Jews shall, on their conversion, be grafted again. Now, is this comparison reconcilable with the sentiment, that the Jewish and Christian churches are two churches entirely and essentially different? On this supposition, the Gentiles were not grafted into the Jewish olive-tree; nor can the Jews, when converted, be grafted in again: for the tree has perished; the Jewish church has long ago been destroyed. On this supposition, the Jews will be introduced into a church of which they never formed a part; grafted into an olive-tree from which they were never broken off, and of which they never were the natural branches. But admitting the truth for which we plead, the church

of God to be one, and its unity unimpaired by a change in external dispensations, the Christian being only a continuation of the Jewish church; and the figure appears natural and just, expressive and beautiful. The Gentiles do indeed partake of the root and fatness of that olive-tree, from which the Jews were broken off; enjoying those very covenant-privileges and promises, which the latter forfeited by their unbelief: and when the unhappy descendants of faithful Abraham shall turn to the Lord, they will be brought into the Christian church; and, by union to it, will be grafted into their own olive-tree, and recover those very covenant-privileges and promises which they formerly lost.

We may, then, assume the unity of the church of God as a sound and established principle; a principle flowing from the very nature of this holy society, and sanctioned by apostolic authority.

From this principle, we infer the interest of Gentile-believers in the covenant of Abraham: for, being members of that very church to which this covenant was granted, they must have a claim to its promised blessings. Christians, by incorporation into the church of God, have succeeded the Jews in the enjoyment of all privileges and blessings that remain unrevoked, and are bound to observe all general laws which have not been repealed; just as a foreigner, on being made an adopted citizen of this country, acquires all the

rights, and comes under all the obligations of natural born citizens. And as this covenant, by which the church was regularly organized in Abraham's family, is perpetual, believers must, in right of their adoption, have a complete interest in all its promised benefits.

3. *Believing Gentiles are denominated the SEED and the CHILDREN of Abraham.* They are *the children of the promise*, given to Christ by his Father's promise; and are, therefore, as Paul teaches, Rom. ix. 8, "counted for the seed;" that spiritual seed which the promises made to Abraham especially contemplated. In chapter iv. 16. of the same epistle, we are plainly taught, that the patriarch's seed is composed, not only of his natural descendants, who were under the law; but also of Gentiles who imitate his faith, although they are not his children by carnal descent, nor under the law: "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all." And, in Gal. iii. 7, 29, the apostle speaks still plainer, and expressly denominates Gentile-believers the children and seed of Abraham: "Know ye, therefore, that they which are of faith, the same are the *children of Abraham.*" "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's *seed*, and heirs according to the promise."

Now, Gentile-believers, being the seed of Abraham, must unquestionably have an interest in that covenant, which was made with their illustrious parent, and with his seed; not, indeed, with all his carnal, but certainly with all his spiritual seed. Children by adoption inherit with children by birth, from their common parent. This point is decided by the text just quoted; in which St. Paul affirms believers to be the seed of Abraham, and heirs *according to the promise*. What promise? The great promise of the covenant, securing to all his spiritual seed, righteousness, life, and salvation; in which God engages to be to him and to his believing seed, a God in the noblest sense of the promise.

4. *This covenant constituted Abraham the father both of the Jewish and Christian churches, or, in other words, of believers in all nations, till the end of time* The patriarch must sustain a paternal relation to all believers, or they could not sustain to him the relation of children. These are correlates. His character as father of both churches is expressly declared in Rom. iv. 11, 12. In illustrating that text, it was proved, that his paternal relation to believers was constituted by this covenant; that, on account of this relation to his spiritual seed among Gentile nations, as well as among his natural descendants, his name was changed from *Abram* to *Abraham*; that, as his

children, Gentile-believers receive, by inheritance, *spiritual blessings*; such as justification by faith, and the gift of the Holy Spirit; and that he was constituted a father to them, for the very purpose of *transmitting* to them these benefits of the covenant.* Can a doubt, then, remain, whether Gentile-believers have an interest in this covenant, which constituted Abraham their father in order to convey to them its invaluable blessings? Unquestionably, its benefits must belong to all his seed contemplated in it: and to contend against the interest of any part of them, is as unreasonable and unjust, as it would be to contend against the right of an adopted child to a share in his father's estate, although the will of the deceased expressly recognised his right.

Prejudice, arising from attachment to a favourite tenet, may lead some to attempt to disprove the right of Gentile-believers to claim, with their Jewish brethren, a portion in their common father's inheritance: but, so long as an inspired writer advocates their cause, all such endeavours must be fruitless. Their right is asserted, and powerfully maintained by the great apostle. He not only proves, as we have already shown, that Abraham was, by this covenant, constituted father of Gentile-believers to transmit to them its blessings; but also, that the covenant was *designedly* so contrived as to secure its benefits to them,

* See Letter II, pages 17—25.

as well as to his natural descendants. See Rom. iv. 13—17. The promise, mentioned in the thirteenth verse, is, in no other part of sacred scripture, expressed in the same words. It is, however, equivalent to the quotation, in the seventeenth verse, taken from this very covenant: “*I have made thee a father of many nations:*” and, therefore, we might with propriety substitute, for the term *promise*, the word *covenant*, throughout the apostle’s argument; or use them *interchangeably*, as he himself does, while reasoning on the same subject, justification by faith, in his epistle to the Galatians. See chap. iii. 11—29.



LETTER VI.

Children have an interest in this covenant.—In what respects the Christian surpasses, in spirituality, the Jewish dispensation.

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN,

YOUR right to share in the blessings of your father Abraham, has been established. By arguments founded on the continued existence of his covenant,—on the unity of the church,—on the facts, that believing Gentiles are denominated his

seed, and that he was, by this covenant, constituted their father;—by these arguments, all along confirmed by apostolic authority, it has been amply proved, *That Gentile-believers have, with the patriarch's natural descendants, a common interest in this blessed covenant.*

In this letter, your attention will be directed to that important question relative to the right of children under the present dispensation. That they had formerly an interest in Abraham's covenant, is universally admitted. But it is strenuously contended by many, that their covenant-interest perished with the Mosaic economy. We rise up in defence of our little ones, and maintain their blessing to be as durable as the covenant itself. Grant me your attention, and I will endeavour to establish this truth, so dear to every heart that understands its importance, by fair and satisfactory arguments.

1. *The comprehensive import of the term SEED, proves the right of children to covenant-blessings.* It is certain, that Abraham's natural descendants were comprised under this term; because the token of the covenant was, by divine appointment, applied to them: and it is equally certain, that the term retained its original signification till our Saviour's incarnation; not from any error in the opinion prevalent among the Israelites, but from a decision of God himself. “*This is my covenant,*

which ye shall keep between me and you, and thy seed after thee; Every MAN-CHILD among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.—And the uncircumcised man-child, whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; HE HATH BROKEN MY COVENANT.” “Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the COVENANT which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.”†*

Thus, the meaning of this term was settled by divine authority, and received and acted on by the church, during many successive ages.

Why should not the same original meaning of this term be retained under the Christian economy? Why set to its comprehension limits which it never had before; so as to exclude the great body of those who were, from the beginning, in covenant with God, and denominated the seed of Abraham? Has the term undergone a material alteration in its original meaning? When? By what authority? The extent of this term being defined by the Maker of the covenant, his authority, it is manifest, signified either formally or, at least impliedly, must be necessary to diminish that extent. If he have expressed his will to this effect, it can be shown. Let the passage be pro-

* Gen. xvii. 10, 11, 14.

† Acts iii. 25.

duced. In vain are the inspired records searched for any intimation of the kind. Surely, it can never be fairly pleaded, in proof of an important alteration in this term, that the apostle shows it comprehends true believers among Gentile nations; for he equally proves it to have comprehended, in a special manner, true believers among Abraham's natural descendants: and, therefore, if the children of Christian parents are, on this account, to be excluded, the children of the Jews too ought, for the same reason, to have been excluded. But this would have contravened a positive determination of God himself. The fact is, from the beginning, the term respected **CHIEFLY** the *spiritual seed*, without excluding the *natural seed*.

2. *When a Gentile was converted from idolatry to the worship of the true God, his CHILDREN, being circumcised as well as himself, became incorporated with the Jewish people, and were admitted to the enjoyment of all their privileges.* “And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. One law shall be to him that is home-born, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you.”* That cir-

* Exod. xii. 48, 49.

circumcision confirmed to strangers an interest in Abraham's covenant, as well as in the national compact, is evident from the provision originally made in the former, for the admission of children born of Gentile parents. The patriarch was commanded to apply the token of his covenant to such as were not his natural seed: "He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised."*

Now, may we not infer, from this fact, that children have, in common with Christian parents, an interest in the covenant? For if, under the former dispensation, the offspring of Gentiles were received into it, and had it confirmed to them by the application of its seal; why are they to be excluded from it under the Christian dispensation? Was not their admission formerly a plain intimation, that they would be admitted, when Gentile nations should, by the gospel of Jesus Christ, be brought into the church? Had Jehovah directed their exclusion, we should have bowed to his sovereign authority. But, as it appears he has given no such direction, it follows conclusively, that the long continued practice, founded on *positive precept*, should still prevail; and that we are bound to recognise children as being in the covenant together with their parents. In confirmation of this right of our infant offspring, may be adduced the following text: "And the scripture, foreseeing

* Gen. xvii. 13.

that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, *saying*, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.* How was Abraham blessed? By personal justification undoubtedly: and so are Gentile-believers. But was he not also blessed by the interest of his children in that covenant which exhibited to them the righteousness of faith? Certainly. If, then, his blessing reached to his *offspring*, must we not conclude, that the blessing of Christian believers, who are blessed with faithful Abraham, terminates not in themselves, but extends to their *offspring*?

3. *If children have no interest in the covenant, then it will follow, that an IMPORTANT PRIVILEGE of it has been revoked, under the gospel dispensation.* That the admission of children into the covenant, and the application of its seal to them, under the Jewish economy, was a *privilege* granted to parents, will not, we presume, be denied by any. Nor can it be denied, by those who understand the nature of this covenant, to have been an *important* privilege. For what did it import? What did the covenant exhibit? It exhibited the righteousness of faith, and all saving blessings to every covenantee. It gave him a solemn pledge, that God

* Gal. iii. 8, 9.

was willing to be reconciled to him, through the anticipated merits of his Son; that he was willing to become his God, not only by external relation, but by spiritual union and communion. It assured all who wore the seal, that they formed a part of that holy society, which Jehovah had set apart for himself, and on which he was bestowing the blessings of salvation; not indeed on all, but on as many of them as he, in exercise of his sovereign grace, should be pleased to select. Was not this a privilege, and a *great* privilege? One might as well deny it to be a blessing to live in a society where the gospel is preached, and the institutions of it are observed; as deny the covenant-interest of Jewish children to have been an important blessing.

The principle just contended for being assumed, it will follow, that the people of God are deprived of a very important privilege, under the Christian economy, if their children be excluded from the covenant. To admit this, would be to violate all analogy in the government of God over his church. Is it not plain matter of fact, that his people have been favoured, as with a gradual increase of revealed knowledge, so with a gradual increase of privilege? When God commenced the patriarchal dispensation with Abraham, he revoked no privilege previously granted to his church. Abraham and his descendants continued to enjoy what had been conferred on their prede-

cessors, together with additional light and privileges vouchsafed to them. When the national compact was made, it abrogated no former privilege; but was, as Moses (see Deut. xxix. 12, 13) and Paul (see Gal. iii. 15—19) concur in teaching, intended to aid in accomplishing the promises made to Abraham and his seed. And shall we, in opposition to the analogy of former dispensations, believe that, under the Christian economy, which has so much increased the light and blessings of the church, the great privilege of children has been revoked; that they are no longer permitted to stand, with their parents, in a covenant-relation to God? Surely, those who contend against a right secured to them by solemn compact, and confirmed by an appointed seal, ought to produce some repealing act of our heavenly Lawgiver; before they deprive them of this precious privilege, enjoyed through many successive generations, from Abraham to Christ; and reduce the offspring of God's covenant-people to a level with the children of aliens from his covenant-promises! But in vain will search be made for such a repealing act. So far from being abrogated, the pen of inspiration has proved that the covenant remains in full and unabated force.*

4. *The accomplishment of the GRAND PURPOSE of this covenant, renders the interest of children in*

* See Letter IV. particularly from page 56 to 58

it, as necessary under the present, as under the preceding dispensation. It has already been proved, that the great design which God had in view when he condescended to make this covenant, was, not only to introduce his Messiah into the world, but also to perpetuate, in the line of Abraham's posterity, his spiritual church, and gather, from among them, a people to his praise; and that this constituted a special reason, why the patriarch's carnal seed were generally admitted into the covenant, and impressed with its seal.*

If, then, it can be proved that Jehovah's original design abides unaltered, the interest of children in his covenant will be firmly established: and it will be in vain to urge as an objection, that the great purpose of introducing Messiah into the world, has been accomplished; because another important purpose, to which our Saviour's incarnation was subservient, remains yet to be fulfilled; namely, that of bringing, to the enjoyment of saving blessings, the elect of God among the seed of his covenant-people.

Much need not be said to make out this point. The covenant, as has been evinced, remains in full force; unimpaired, either by the introduction, or by the abrogation, of the law or Sinai-covenant.† It cannot, then, be reasonably supposed, that the great design of it has been laid aside, or materially and essentially altered. Did the spiritual church

* See Letter III.

† See Letter IV.

descend, from generation to generation, among the descendants of Abraham, natural and adopted; and was an election of grace always found among them? and can it be imagined that the spiritual church no longer descends in the line of God's covenant-people's seed; that the blessings of grace no longer flow down among them, as in their appointed and steady channel? Did the Most High show such a regard to his people's offspring, under the Jewish economy, and bind himself by covenant-engagement thus to treat them? and does he, under the present economy, act so differently, as to show no more regard to them than to the children of aliens from his church? Has the covenant undergone an alteration so important and essential, that the infant children of Abraham's adopted seed are cast out; although from its original establishment, through a long course of ages, till the birth of our Redeemer, they were admitted to share in its blessings, and had their interest in them confirmed by an appointed seal? Who can believe this; especially when it is considered that sacred scripture speaks not a word about any such change? An alteration so great and important, would indeed have set aside the original and grand design of this covenant; and, in doing so, would have affected its essential engagements to that degree, as almost to destroy the very existence of the covenant itself. Such a change is utterly at variance with that lucid and decisive argument.

which Paul urges, with great force, in the third chapter of his epistle to the Galatians.

When the Jews shall have been converted to the Christian faith, they will recover all their former covenant-rights and privileges; and their children will, by virtue of God's unrevoked promise, be brought again into the same relation to him which they so long enjoyed; and will again become a nursery to the spiritual church, descending among them from generation to generation. This statement cannot be controverted, without proving the covenant, either to have been abolished, which can never be done, while the decision of an inspired apostle maintains its authority; or to have undergone, in a most important point, such an alteration as deprives children of their chartered rights. But where, we repeat the question where are we taught, that the covenant has been thus changed, and that its original design has been abandoned? No instruction to this effect is to be found in holy scripture.

Indeed, to apply to the covenant a meaning so different from what it formerly had, is to resist the evidence of plain facts. For if it no longer require, that God should ever again show a regard to Abraham's carnal seed, why are they preserved a distinct people? Why have they not been lost among the nations with whom they have lived? From their preservation, is it not apparent, that the covenant has still a favourable aspect toward

them, considered as the *seed* of Abraham, the friend of God? and that the intention of this marvellous interposition of divine providence, is, to make it the more conspicuous, at their conversion, that “*the gifts and calling of God,*” as the apostle affirms ON THIS VERY POINT, “*are without repentance;*”* and that, although they are enemies concerning the gospel, for the sake of us Gentiles; yet, “*as touching the election, they are beloved for the Father's sake?*”† The language of their famous prophet concurs, with divine providence, in supporting our statement: “*Thus saith the LORD, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all. And I will bring forth a SEED out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains: and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there.*”‡ From an inspection of the chapter, in which these words are recorded, it will be found to contain a prediction of the present dispersion of the Jews, and of their future restoration. In this quotation, then, we have assigned the reason why they have not been utterly destroyed: it is because an elect *seed* are yet to descend from them, who shall, in due time, be collected together and reestablished in their ancient inheritance. And in the twenty-third verse of the same chapter, we are assured,

* Rom. xi. 29.

† Chap. xi. 28.

‡ Isaiah lxxv. 8, 9.

that the children of the Jewish people, when recovered from their dispersion, shall share with their parents in their long forfeited privileges: “*For they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their OFFSPRING with them.*”

Now, if Jewish children shall, at the restoration of Israel, be brought into their ancient covenant-relation to God, it will follow as an indubitable consequence, that the children of Gentile-parents must share in the same privilege. For it cannot be supposed, that, after the breaking down of the middle-wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, there should be raised between them, when united into one church, such a distinction as would exist, if children of the latter were excluded from the covenant, while those of the former were admitted. This would contradict Paul’s doctrine with respect to unity of privilege under the gospel: “*There is neither Jew nor Greek, &c. for ye are all ONE in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the*” full import of the “*promise.*”^{*} Hence we conclude, That Gentile-children will sustain a covenant-relation to God, in that happy period when Jew and Gentile shall be united into one church; and, therefore, that they have, at present, an interest in the covenant: for the promise cannot hereafter acquire a meaning different from what it has constantly borne under the Christian dispensation.

^{*} Gal. iii. 28, 29.

Thus, the great design of this covenant, it appears, remains unaltered. Hence it follows, that the covenant-right of children *now*, stands on the same ground on which it *always* stood: namely, *Jehovah's engagement to transmit saving blessings in the line of his covenant-people's seed.* A nursery for his spiritual church is as necessary at present as it ever was. The gospel, owing to the mixed state of mankind, is preached to all indiscriminately, that the elect of God may be gathered: so the covenant, in its external form, embraces all the offspring of God's people, that the spiritual blessings of it may be secured, and, in due season, applied, to his elect seed among them.

5. *Christian children enjoy, in an improved state, all the other privileges formerly enjoyed by Jewish children; and the church actually descends AMONG THEM, from one generation to another.* Were the latter placed under a dispensation of grace, and made the depository of the divine oracles? The former live under the new and better dispensation, superior in light and power; and possess, in addition to those of the Old, the clearer oracles of the New, Testament, the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. Were Jewish children blessed with the instruction of inspired prophets? Christian children are blessed with the teaching of ministers, uninspired indeed, but knowing unspeakably more of the mystery of salvation, than

prophets the most celebrated. “Among them that are born of women, there hath not,” said our Lord, “risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven, is greater than he.” Were the parents of the former solemnly charged to instruct them carefully and diligently in religious truth and duty?* The parents of the latter are equally bound to attend to their Christian education: for they are solemnly commanded to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.† Did Jehovah bless the means of grace, under the old dispensation, to the offspring of his covenant-people? He blesses the means of grace to them, under the new dispensation, more abundantly and extensively.

Thus, it appears, from this parallel, that Christian children enjoy, in an improved state, all the privileges enjoyed by Jewish children. Yet the former have, contend some, been deprived of that ennobling privilege, a covenant-relation to God, from which resulted, and by which were secured to the latter, all their other blessings! How incredible this opinion! The foundation is subverted, but the building stands!

Another fact worthy of your attentive consideration, is, the PERPETUATION of the church among *Christian children*, from generation to generation. None acquainted with the history of

* Deut. vi. 6.

† Ephes. vi. 4.

the church universal, or of particular churches, can deny this fact. When God is about to extend the limits of his Zion, he necessarily steps beyond the habitations of his people, and pours out his Spirit on heathen families. But it is an incontrovertible fact, that the church has uniformly descended among the posterity of Christians; and that multitudes of them, in successive generations, have been called by the grace of God, and made partakers of eternal life, and all intermediate blessings of the covenant.

In particular churches, who constitute the mass of true believers?—the children of strangers, or the children of God's people? We do, indeed, and blessed be God for it, see instances of sovereign grace displayed in converting persons descended from ungodly and unbelieving parents. But, may we not assert it as a fact not to be disproved, that the mass of true believers are ordinarily the children of God's covenant-people?

Grace, it is true, descends not with the blood, from father to son, as an inheritance: yet it does descend from one generation of Christians to another: for the prayers and instructions of the generation preceding, like the seed from which springs the harvest, is sure to be followed by fruit in the generation succeeding. Indeed, were the fact otherwise, it would militate against the use of means. Means, we admit, are not always successful with respect to religion; nor are they in

natural things: in both cases they often prove ineffectual; and this, no doubt, happens to teach us our dependence for success on the divine blessing. Hence, among the most profligate, are sometimes found children born of the most pious parents. But, although there is no necessary connexion between the use of means and the communication of grace to our children, yet there is unquestionably established between them a connexion sufficient to show their importance, and encourage parental diligence; but not enough to weaken our sense of dependence on God's blessing for success. "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it."* "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his *covenant*, and to those that remember his commandments to do them."† Means, in all other matters, are generally successful: and it would be strange if, in the more important concerns of religion, they should not be attended with success. God certainly does bestow his blessing on the use of appointed means, parental instruction, discipline, and example, and render them effectual to the conversion of children: and this furnishes conclusive proof, that religion is still transmitted, from father to son, in the successive generations of his professing people.

* Prov. xxii. 6.

Psal. ciii. 17, 18.

Here are two REMARKABLE AND INCONTESTABLE FACTS. The children of believers enjoy, in an improved condition, all the privileges formerly enjoyed by Jewish children; and the promised blessings of God's covenant come uniformly upon them, from generation to generation. What conclusion shall we draw from these facts? How shall we account for this steady state of things, through a long course of ages? It results, no doubt, from the will of divine providence: and so did that similar state of things which uniformly prevailed under the ancient economy. Then, however, it was produced by the superintending care of Jehovah, in fulfilment of his covenant-engagements with his church: and can it be admitted that, under the present dispensation, this remarkable state of things has no connexion with that same unaltered covenant? that the children of his people continue to receive its blessings, although they have been deprived of the promise by which these blessings were formerly entailed on them? What agreement would there be, between such inferences and the premises from which they must be drawn? You might as well attempt to reconcile light and darkness.

If the promise be recalled; if children be cast out of God's covenant; why do we not see a corresponding change in his providence? Can another occurrence like this be shown in the history of his church; in which expulsion from a covenant-rela-

tion to him, was attended by no forfeiture of privileges connected with this relation? The Jews have been ejected from the covenant of their fathers: What has followed? God frowns upon them, and upon their children. They have the scriptures of the Old Testament; but it is to them a sealed book. They read it with the veil upon their hearts. Those very writings of Moses and the prophets, which were formerly made, by the blessing of God, "a savour of life unto life." are now, "a savour of death unto death." The Spirit of the Lord has departed from them. Thus, the providence and the word of God speak the same language; they both proclaim the same awful sentence: "*Ye are not my people.*" God hath given to Judah a bill of divorcement. In like manner he treated Israel. By their idolatries, the Ten Tribes broke covenant with him: and He, after bearing, with much long suffering patience, their unfaithfulness, cast them entirely off; deprived them of the instructions of his prophets, and sent them far away from the land of their fathers into strange countries, where they have been lost for ages. When Esau, for contempt of his birth-right, was deprived of it, and the covenant was established in the family of Jacob, God, by his providence, marked the difference in the religious condition of these two brothers; displaying the truth, long before the mouth of his prophet uttered it: "*Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I*

*hated.*** In a similar way, God dealt with Abraham's eldest son, after he was excluded from the covenant. Ishmael and his children were deprived of those external religious privileges, and of those gracious visitations of the Holy Spirit, which the covenant secured to Isaac, and to his seed, in the line of Jacob.

Thus, from the history of God's dealings with his church, it appears that, whenever any branch of his people were cast out of his covenant, he *always* marked the forfeiture which they had incurred, by frowning upon them in his providence—by depriving them of their religious advantages—and by withholding the influence of his blessed Spirit. Is it possible, then, that the children of his people, under the Christian dispensation, with whom he deals in a way of mercy *directly the opposite*, should have been shut out of his covenant? His providence smiles upon them; his grace descends upon them. They enjoy all the external privileges of his covenant; and the blessings of Abraham, saving covenant-blessings come upon them. How plainly both the providence and the Spirit of God contradict the sentiment, that our children are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise!

These two facts, stated and illustrated, authorize us to conclude, from the undeviating procedure of divine providence in regard to the church,

* Rom. ix. 15. Mal. i. 1

That children have still an interest in Jehovah's unrevoked covenant; and that the God of Abraham continues to fulfil his ancient promise, by bestowing on the seed of his people covenant-blessings, life and salvation; and by raising up children in place of their fathers, as a generation to serve him, and maintain his cause in the world.

On grounds so firm, my brethren, rests the right of children. The settled meaning of the term *seed*;—the admission of children born of Gentiles proselyted to the Jewish religion, to an interest in the covenant, confirmed to them by an application of its seal;—the importance of this privilege;—and the great design of the covenant;—have each furnished us with a solid argument in favour of the right of our offspring. Combined, they present a body of evidence which cannot be resisted; especially when contemplated in connexion with the facts, that Christian children enjoy, in an improved state, all the other privileges which Jewish children enjoyed, and that the great covenant-promise is uniformly fulfilled to them, from generation to generation.

Against the covenant-interest of children, it is objected, That the present dispensation is too spiritual to admit them to that near relation to God which they formerly sustained. The objection is plausible. But, when investigated, it will be found, that its whole force depends on begging the question in dispute. For what is the question? It is this: Have children a covenant-relation to God

under the present dispensation? Now, to affirm the present dispensation to be too spiritual to admit them to such a relation, amounts indeed to a *denial* of their ancient right, but it presents *no proof*. It is bare assertion; a simple begging of the question. To establish the conclusion, which the affirmation pretends to prove, it ought to be evinced, by solid arguments, *either* that the covenant has been vacated, *or* that the right of children under it has been revoked. But, without any proof of this kind, to assume it as a principle, that the present dispensation is too spiritual to allow them to hold their ancient chartered right, is illogical in the highest degree. It is inverting the order in the argument. It is substituting the conclusion for the premises, and the premises for the conclusion: because it ought, first, to be proved, that the covenant-right of children has been taken away from them, by that high authority from which it was derived; and, then, from this established fact, it might be fairly inferred, that the present dispensation is inconsistent with the continued enjoyment of their ancient right.

This fact, however, can never be established. The right of children rests, as we have evinced, on a sure and solid basis; unaffected by the change which has taken place in the economy of God's government over his church. It is secured to them by that irrevocable covenant, in which it was originally granted by supreme authority.

The principle, thus gratuitously assumed, on which this objection depends, is pushed by others to a greater length. One sect of Christians affirm, that the present dispensation is so spiritual, as to forbid the use of baptism and the Lord's supper, and to be inconsistent with the ministry of an order of men specially set apart to preach the gospel: and they have as good ground for their assertion, as those who affirm the covenant-right of infants to be incompatible with the spirituality of the Christian dispensation. Both, however, assume, as a settled maxim, what ought first to be proved: and, therefore, the conclusions drawn from it are mere assumptions, and entirely fallacious. Were this mode of reasoning allowed, what ordinance could withstand its attacks? Permit me thus to assume my principle, and I can, with a dash of my pen, overturn the whole external order of the church. I can prove improper, not only the use of sacraments, but also public worship; nay, an open profession of religion to be unchristian: merely by affirming, that all these things are inconsistent with the spirituality of the present dispensation.

The fallacy of the objection is apparent. It may, however, be useful here to detain you, by making some remarks toward elucidating the difference, with respect to spirituality, in the two economies. That the Jewish is surpassed by the Christian dispensation, in spirituality, is an un-

questionable fact: the former being suited, as an inspired writer teaches, to the church in a state of minority, and the latter adapted to her condition when arrived at mature age.* The ideas, however, entertained by some divines with respect to the Jewish church, are entirely unwarrantable, and degrading to her character in the highest degree. Authors of respectable name have represented her as little more than a political society, and contended that God required of her members only external obedience: a sentiment directly opposed to the grand design of the covenant under which she existed, and contradictory to express precepts and texts of sacred scripture. Have we not seen, that the Abrahamic covenant, by which the Jewish church was constituted, contemplated, as its grand design, the calling of God's elect seed to the enjoyment of himself, and the preparing of them for a state of heavenly glory? Does not our Lord make the sum of that law, which was given to his church, to consist in *love to God and love to man*? Were not God's ancient people required to rend their *hearts*, and not their garments; to make them *new hearts*, and *new spirits*?† Did David imagine he had done his duty, merely by yielding an external obedience to divine precepts? Far from it. "Behold," he exclaims, "thou desirest truth in the *inward parts*: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would

* Gal. iv. 1—7.

† Joel ii. 13. Ezek. xviii. 31.

I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”* How can a notion so degrading be reconciled with the majesty, the purity, and the omniscience of the great Head of the church? Was not the Son of God as glorious in majesty, as spotless in purity, as infinite in knowledge, when he governed his church by the former economy, as since he commenced his new and better dispensation? How was it possible, for Him who looketh on the heart, and trieth the reins of the children of men, even to issue laws requiring nothing more than bare external obedience, and institute a *church* merely for political ends! That the Son of God was *king* of Israel, and that he gave them, as a nation, a code of civil and political laws, is readily admitted. But, from this fact, to infer the church, under the Jewish economy, to have been a mere political society, is as absurd, as it would be to infer that the church under the Christian dispensation is of the same nature, because Jesus Christ is now styled “King of kings,” and king in Zion. The truth is, the Jewish people were both a *nation* and a *church*: societies intimately blended, but entirely *distinct*, in their laws and ends; just as the corporate and church-states of any religious society, are distinct, although closely united: and as the constitution of the former state is subservient to the spiritual purposes and ends of

* Psa. li. 6, 16, 17.

the latter; so the political state of the Jewish nation was intended to be subservient to the great ends of the church. Our Lord assumed the character of king to accomplish, the more effectually, his views as Head of his church. The Sinai-constitution being abolished, the church exists now as she did during the whole period intervening between the date of it and that of Abraham's covenant, in a *separate capacity*: and she exists under the *identical* covenant, by which she was constituted and organized in the patriarch's family. This is not, and never was, as some intimate, an *ecclesiastico-political* constitution,* but a *divine* constitution adapted to the nature of God's church; that holy society which he has separated from the world, for the *maintenance of his worship, the promotion of his glory, and the salvation of his elect.*

Again: The difference of the two dispensations, in regard to spirituality, does not consist in an entire abolition of external form and ordinances under the present. Such there must be while man remains what he is: and certainly baptism, the Lord's supper, and public worship, which belong to the Christian dispensation, are external ordinances.

Nor does the difference consist in an entire exclusion of unsanctified members from the Christian church. A Judas, called a *devil*, was a member of our Saviour's little family: Simon Magus, a man "yet in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of

* Booth

iniquity," was baptized by Philip the evangelist;* and an incestuous person was a member of the Corinthian church, founded by Paul.† In every age, there have always been, even in the purest churches of any size, hypocrites and other unworthy characters. Perfect purity cannot possibly be obtained, while the door of admission is intrusted to the hands of fallible mortals, who look, not on the heart, but on the outward appearance. Our Lord, in his parable of the tares growing with the wheat, plainly intimates that a corrupt mixture will ever be found in his church; guards his servants against such attempts to purify her, as might endanger the privileges of real believers; and assures us, that a perfect separation between the righteous and the wicked will not take place, till the end of the world; "when he will send forth his angels to gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity."‡

In what, then, consists the superior spirituality of the Christian dispensation? Simply in the abolition of that burdensome ritual, instituted by the Sinai-covenant, and adapted to the minor-state of the church; and in the introduction of an external form and ritual suited to a state in which the church has arrived at mature age, and is permitted to enjoy the adoption of sons. Her members are no longer obliged to repair to the temple at Jerusalem; but enjoy the liberty of erecting, in any place that

* Acts viii. 13, 23. † 1 Cor. v. 1. ‡ Mat. xxiv. 13—30, 36—43.

may suit their convenience, houses of worship. No longer restricted to one altar on which to offer their sacrifices, they may every where lift up holy hands, and present, with acceptance, their sacrifices of prayer, thanksgiving, and praise. The severe authority of Moses, who subjected the church to numerous rites, costly sacrifices, oppressive ceremonies, "a yoke which" she was "unable to bear;" has given place to the mild reign of Jesus Christ, who governs her by ordinances few in number, simple in meaning, and easy to be understood. The splendid service of the temple has been succeeded by the simplicity of a Christian assembly; the ministry of Aaron and his sons, adorned with gems and costly robes, by the ministry of apostles and their successors, officiating in plain attire; the bondage of "beggarly elements," by the freedom of gospel worship; the servile distance at which the church stood from her glorious Head, by that near approach which she makes, in virtue of the blood of Jesus; coming not *once* in a year, but *daily*; not with *dread*, but with *boldness* into the holiest, even to the mercy-seat of her God. The gospel preached in types and ceremonies, has been succeeded by the gospel preached plainly and fully; "the ministration of condemnation," by "the ministration of righteousness;" the "spirit of bondage," by "the spirit of adoption." In a word, the obscurity, restraints, and servile fear of the Mosaic, have given

place to the light and freedom, love and joy, of the Christian dispensation.

In such respects, the present economy surpasses the former, in spirituality. But the exclusion of children from church-membership, forms no part of its superiority. The constitution of the church is such, at present, that it does not prevent the admission of hypocrites, and other vile characters, making a credible profession of religion; why, then, should it be thought unbecoming the purity and majesty of God, to permit children to retain that external relation to himself, which they derived from his express appointment, and enjoyed, without interruption, for so long a period? How unreasonable to suppose, that an alteration in religious ceremonies should cut off from the church a whole class of members! destroy a right secured by a perpetual covenant; a covenant which originally contemplated the admission of Gentiles, as well as the natural descendants of Abraham; a covenant affected, neither by the formation, nor by the abolition, of the Sinai-covenant, with all its appendent laws and ceremonies!

LETTER VII.

Duties of the covenant

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN,

FROM the nature of this covenant, containing, as evinced, blessings so invaluable, and formed for purposes so important,* it is obvious, that very serious duties must be imposed on every covenantee. Permit me to present you with a brief view of them.

The bestowment of any favour by the Most High, lays the recipient under a corresponding obligation to gratitude, praise, and obedience. Have we derived our existence from God? and do we depend on him for life, and breath, and all things? We are bound to worship him as our Creator, Preserver, and Benefactor; and to express our gratitude, by employing, in his service and to his glory, all the powers with which he has endowed our nature. Had this covenant, then, been granted in an absolute form, and insured to us promised blessings, without requiring the performance of any duty on our part in order to a participation in them; it would have laid us under obligations to gratitude and praise. Such is the covenant made with Noah and

* Letter II and III.

all flesh. It engages that the earth shall never be again destroyed by a deluge, and that seed-time and harvest, day and night, summer and winter, shall alternately succeed each other, till the expiration of time: and the benefits of it are secured by an absolute promise, the fulfilment of which depends not at all on the performance of any duty by mankind. But although, in this view, no duty is required by it, yet the bestowment of so great favours, certainly imposes on us the duties of gratitude and praise.

The Abrahamic covenant is of a different kind. It requires from every covenantee particular duties, *repentance, faith, and universal holiness.*

Enjoyment of its temporal or external blessings, does not depend on the performance of these duties by every individual: for thousands of Abraham's descendants enjoyed them, who lived and died impenitent and unbelieving. A full enjoyment of them, however, did depend on the prevalence of a certain measure of piety in the Israelitish nation. That generation which came out of Egypt was, on account of their unbelief, excluded from the land of promise: and when idolatry and wickedness prevailed among the Jewish people, after their settlement in Canaan, they were sent into captivity to Babylon; and, many times previous to that event, were they sorely chastised for their sins, by the incursions of neighbouring nations. A similar state of things has existed since the establishment of the

Christian dispensation. Thousands have, without repentance and faith, enjoyed external covenant-blessings, the gospel, and the means of grace: but, when impiety has prevailed much in churches, God has sometimes destroyed them, and removed their candlestick out of its place. The seven churches of Asia furnish mournful illustrations of this truth.

Participation, however, in the spiritual benefits of this covenant, does depend on the exercise of repentance and faith. They are exhibited and offered to every covenantee; yet none come to the actual enjoyment of them, but those who repent and believe. Let me not be misunderstood to mean, that the performance of these duties is, strictly speaking, the condition of receiving covenant-blessings; for, in this respect, they depend on the glorious Mediator of the covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ, whose merits alone are the procuring cause of them. Abraham was not justified by works, but by faith:* and if he, the father of the faithful, the head of the covenant, was justified, not by works, but by that faith which appropriates the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ; then, surely, all believers, his spiritual seed, must be justified in the same free and gracious manner. "If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to all them

* Rom. iv. 1—3.

that believe.”* “Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.”†

But the fact, that justification, and other spiritual blessings of the covenant, are conferred by a gracious donation, excluding all merit; does not militate against the truth, that these benefits are bestowed only on those who repent and believe. The necessity of faith and repentance, imposed on every covenantee, is apparent from the very nature of the covenant. Consider what is its great promise. By it Jehovah engages to be a God to us. Now, does He condescend to make so merciful an offer? Is he ready to become reconciled to us, guilty rebels, through Jesus Christ; blotting out all our sins, and giving us the adoption of children? Surely the very offer binds us to deep humiliation and unfeigned penitence? Should we not repent, heartily repent, of those offences which we have committed against a God so holy, and yet so merciful? This is one of the first steps to be taken in that upright walk or life, which the covenant expressly requires.‡ For a sinner, a rebel, can never walk uprightly before God, until he humble himself at his feet, and repent of the insults which he has, in the course of his rebellion, dared to offer to infinite Majesty.

* Gal. iii. 21, 22.

† Rom. iv. 16.

‡ Gen. xvii. 1.

Equally plain is it, that *faith* is demanded of every covenantee. Without faith, there can be no reconciliation between God and the sinner, nor true, evangelical repentance; and, consequently, no acceptable walking before God; because it must commence with the healing of that unhappy breach of friendship, which sin has made between him and the sinner. Besides, faith is necessary to enable us to accept the great blessing of this covenant; I mean *the righteousness of faith*. This righteousness, even the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ, is exhibited and offered to every covenantee; but it can be appropriated only by a true and living faith. See Rom. x. 5—10.

Further: The covenant imposes the great duty of *universal holiness*. Had we no other proof of this, it might be inferred from the obligations with which it binds us to repentance and faith, the seeds of a new and holy life. But we have positive proof; for it is expressly required. The covenant is introduced in these comprehensive words: “WALK THOU BEFORE ME, AND BE THOU PERFECT.”* or, as the original might be translated, “BE THOU UPRIGHT.” This injunction is as broad, as the apostolic exhortation grounded on the great promises of the gospel: *Having, therefore, these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.* And in fact, these promises belong to the Abra-

* Gen. xvii. 1.

hamic covenant. Compare 2 Cor. vi. 16, vii. 1, with Levit. xxvi. 9—12.

Moreover: The covenant, it is manifest, imposes a particular duty on parents toward their children. That they should endeavour to train them up for God, and lead them to the exercise of that repentance and faith which are necessary to the enjoyment of spiritual blessings, is unquestionably a solemn and an indispensable covenant-duty. Were an opulent person to adopt a poor man's child, and engage to make him, if his conduct should be correct, heir to his estate; would it not be a duty incumbent on the child's parent, consenting to his adoption, to endeavour to give him, while remaining under his care, such instruction, and subject him to such discipline, as might help to form his character, and prepare him for the inheritance in prospect? Apply this to the case before us. God has adopted our children; he has brought them into a special relation to himself, and made them members of his visible church; he exhibits to them his gracious promises, and engages to make every one of them that shall believe, an heir to a heavenly inheritance; and, for a time, he commits them to our care. Can we misunderstand his meaning? Does he not plainly signify it to be his will, that we should bring up our children for him, and endeavour by instruction, discipline, and example, to secure to them the enjoyment of every covenant-blessing? Abraham felt his obligations in reference to

his children: and his zeal to perform his duty, and realize to them covenant-promises, received honourable notice from the Almighty: "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."* From this passage it is evident, that God suspends, in some degree, the fulfilment of his promises, on parental diligence. The patriarch was sensible, that the promises or covenant of God imposed on him the great duty of educating his children in religious knowledge; and that the appointed way for securing to himself and to them the enjoyment of promised blessings, was diligently to perform this great duty. If Christian parents wish to see the blessing of Abraham descending on their children, let them imitate him, by training them up in religious knowledge and practice.

From the view, my brethren, which has been presented, in these letters, of Abraham's covenant, I infer, *That it is in SUBSTANCE the same as the covenant of grace.* To evince this truth, let us run a parallel between the two covenants. Did the latter originate in infinite wisdom? The former had the same origin: being devised, exhibited, and offered to mankind by Jehovah. Does the covenant of grace contain spiritual blessings, and particularly engage, that the Almighty will be a God to

* Gen. xviii. 19.

every believer? The Abrahamic covenant contains spiritual blessings, and is distinguished by the same glorious promise. Does the former exhibit to sinners the righteousness of faith, as the only way of obtaining acceptance with an immaculate Being? The latter exhibits the same righteousness, and for the same purpose: and, hence, circumcision, its ancient token, is denominated “*a seal of the righteousness of faith.*”* Is it Jehovah’s great design, in making an external manifestation of his covenant of grace, to call, convert, and save his elect? Is this the principal reason why it is exhibited and preached to sinners promiseously? The same great design he proposed in the Abrahamic covenant: and this constituted the principal reason why it was made with the carnal, as well as with the spiritual, seed of his faithful servant. Was the former established through the mediation of Jesus Christ? The latter, an inspired writer tells us, was confirmed in Christ;† who, consequently, is the mediator of it. Must not, then, these two covenants, agreeing thus in essential points, be the same in *substance*?

Against this position, will any object, that the covenant of grace contains only spiritual blessings? This sentiment is sanctioned by high authority. But, in opposition to it, I am bold to assert, that it is a sentiment which cannot be supported; a sentiment contradicted by the very nature of this covenant, and by plain scripture-promises. This covenant certain-

* Rom. iv. 11.

† Gal. iii. 17.

ly contains external, as well as spiritual blessings. I speak confidently; because the evidence is full and decisive.

How does the covenant of grace contemplate man? Just as he is: as a creature made up of soul and body; as fallen into a state of sin and misery; as struggling with wants both external and spiritual. And what is the design of this covenant? To relieve the wants of man; to redeem him out of all his miseries. Now, can it be admitted, that such a covenant makes no provision for supplying his external wants? Is his body beneath notice? Are temporal favours unworthy of his reception? Has God, in his covenant, provided amply for the necessities of his soul, and overlooked entirely those of his body? secured to him by promise blessings for the next, and none for the present world? Why should wants of an external kind be thus neglected? Are they not the consequences of sin, of breaking the covenant of works? and is not the covenant of grace intended to do away all the penal effects arising from sin, or the violation of the other? How, then, can it be admitted, that this covenant contains no external blessing?

This sentiment is contradicted, in plain terms, by the promises of the covenant. Let us hear them. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."* "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and

* 1 Tim. iv. 8.

his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”* “All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or *things present*, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s.”† “Be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”‡ “My God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus.”§ Is not this the language of the covenant of grace? Are not these its promises? If not, to what covenant do they belong?

But, it may be said, temporal blessings are bestowed on unbelievers, as well as on believers. Admitted: the fact, however, affords no evidence, that we are not to consider temporal favours, when conferred on believers, as the fruit of covenant-promises. The head of a family gives food and raiment to his domestics, as well as to his children: but would it be correct in the latter to conclude, that, because domestics participate with them in their father’s kindness, they ought not to regard such favours as any evidence of parental love? Can it, then, be correct in believers, the children of God, to conclude that, because the munificence of their heavenly Father permits unbelievers to share with them in blessings of an external nature, they have no reason to regard such as fruits of his covenant-love? Highly dangerous it would indeed be, to con-

* Mat. vi. 33. † 1 Cor. iii. 21—23. ‡ Heb. xiii. 5. § Phil. iv. 19.

sider these blessings as sufficient evidence of their divine adoption. But, having ascertained their filial relation to God, by other scriptural marks, they are authorized to receive every blessing, temporal as well as spiritual, as coming to them through the channel of the covenant, and as tokens of divine love.

Many afflictions are of an external nature: believers and unbelievers are alike subject to them: yet are we assured, by two inspired writers, that, when sent as chastisements to the former, they proceed from parental love, and are to be regarded as covenant-mercies. “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; then will I visit their transgressions with a rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My *covenant* will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips.”*

The covenant of grace, it is not to be doubted, contemplates especially spiritual blessings; and, therefore, it abounds with promises respecting them. But certainly it condescends to provide for man in his present state, and to supply him with food, and raiment, and comforts pertaining to his mortal life. Beside these, there are other more important blessings of an external nature, which result from this

* Heb. xii. 6. Psal. lxxxix. 30—34.

covenant. The sacred scriptures,—the preaching of the gospel,—an order of men consecrated to the ministry, and other officers of the visible church,—the means of grace,—baptism and the Lord's supper,—and public worship;—all these are external blessings, intimately connected with spiritual benefits: and all, it must be confessed, are fruits of the covenant of grace, which mankind would never have enjoyed, had not this covenant been devised and revealed for the salvation of God's elect.

How striking the resemblance between the two covenants! What follows? The conclusion at which we aimed in pointing out their agreement; namely, *That they are in substance the same.**

* In explaining the covenant, I have purposely avoided giving to it any other name, than that derived from the great patriarch's name, with whom it was made. By doing so, I have saved myself the trouble of answering objections, that would have occurred from another denomination to which it appears justly entitled. My object has been to show what it really is in *itself*: and I have contented myself with proving it to be, in substance, the same as the covenant of grace. This was sufficient for my argument; and, therefore, I choose to express my full opinion in this note, that it may not be considered as any part of the discussion.

Abraham's covenant appears to be a new dispensation of the covenant of grace, intended by Jehovah to constitute and organize his church in that patriarch's family. Before this memorable transaction, the covenant of grace, as revealed to mankind, had subsisted in the simple form of a *promise*. But, at this period, the Most High condescended to present it to the faith of his people, in the more encouraging form of a *regular covenant*, confirmed by a visible *sign and seal*; and to engage to transmit the invaluable blessings of it, in the line of Abraham's seed, natural and adopted, till the end of

This truth is certainly admitted by an inspired writer; for he rests on it an argument of great importance to the faith and consolation of believers.* Treating of God's counsel or covenant of grace, he conducts his readers to the memorable transactions with Abraham; and, from the oath which the Most High condescended to interpose for the confirmation of his promises to the patriarch, he evinces the immutability of that covenant to which every believer has fled for refuge to his guilty soul. But, if the covenant of Abraham and the covenant of grace, be entirely and essentially different, with what propriety could the apostle infer from the oath confirming the former, that the latter was confirmed by the same amazing stoop of infinite condescension? Deny these covenants to be in substance the same, and you subvert the very foundation on which the sacred writer has built his argument. But admit this truth, which he takes for granted, and the propriety of his reasoning is immediately perceived, and its energy felt.

the world. This I express as an opinion. In support of it I shall offer no other evidence, than what arises from the explanation which has been given of the nature of the covenant; because, as already mentioned, I do not wish it to be considered as forming any part of the discussion contained in these letters.

* Heb. vi. 13, 20. Gen. xxii. 16, 17.

LETTER VIII.

THE RESULT: *Children have a divine right to baptism.*

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN,

THE explanation of that ever memorable covenant, which Jehovah condescended to make with Abraham, is now finished. Permit me, previously to leading you to consider the grand result, briefly to recapitulate the truths that have been established and illustrated. In the course of these letters, we have proved the following points:

1. That the covenant comprehends both spiritual and external blessings.*

2. That its design was and is, not only to constitute the visible church in Abraham's family, but, also and chiefly, to perpetuate among his seed the *spiritual* church, and to *transmit* to God's elect among them, from generation to generation, the blessings of life and salvation, till time shall end.†

3. That the covenant is perpetual.‡

* Letter II. † Letters III, V, and VI. ‡ Letter IV.

4. That Gentile-believers, and their children, have an interest in it, being the seed and heirs of their father Abraham.*

5. That this covenant imposes on every covenantee the great duties of repentance, faith, and universal holiness; and special obligations on parents to train up their children in the fear and service of God.†

6. Finally, That this covenant is, in substance, the same as the covenant of grace.‡

These several truths are intimately connected, and depend one upon another, as stones in a building. They are all essential to a correct knowledge of that gracious covenant, which secures to believers and their children privileges and blessings more valuable than rubies, and much fine gold. Take away either of them, and you obscure its glory; if not endanger its existence, as when a pillar is removed by which an edifice is supported. It was necessary, therefore, to place each of these truths distinctly before you, and endeavour to establish your faith in them, by solid and satisfactory arguments. The way is now prepared to consider the important consequence, deducible from the discussion through which you have been conducted.

THE GRAND RESULT, my brethren, *of all these truths, is, THAT CHILDREN HAVE A DIVINE RIGHT TO BAPTISM.*

* Letter V and VI.

† Letter VII

‡ Idem.

1. *Their interest in Abraham's covenant entitles them to baptism.* Why is this Christian rite administered to adults? Because they are professed believers? Granted. But who are believers? Children of Abraham, who, having by faith gained an interest in his covenant, receive, as *his appointed heirs*, all its spiritual blessings, as an *inheritance*.* If, then, adults are baptized because they appear to be believers, and, consequently, children of Abraham; why should not infants, who are, as well as their parents, the patriarch's seed, be baptized? When Gentiles were proselyted to the Jewish religion, circumcision was applied, not only to themselves, but also to their children; signifying that both had an interest in this covenant, and sustained a filial relation to Abraham. And why should not the same practice prevail under the Christian dispensation? Why should a token of their relation to the patriarch, and of their interest in his covenant, be given to adults, and refused to infants?

2. *Children are MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH, and, on this account too, they ought to be baptized.*

The visible church of God was constituted in Abraham's family, by the covenant established with him; and as an interest in it was expressly granted to children, they were, of course, made members of this holy society. Thus they remained, through many successive generations and ages, till the com-

* See pages 22—25.

mencement of the Christian dispensation. During that long period, no one disputed their special relation to God; all admitted it: and, according to divine direction, they were circumcised as regular members of his church. Nor do the opponents of infant baptism deny this fact. They too confess the church-membership of Jewish children, and allow that they had a right to the covenant-token. Why, then, should any deny that children, under the present dispensation, are members of the church of God? Had the covenant, constituting this sacred society in Abraham's family, been abolished, or had God deprived them of their covenant-interest, their membership would certainly have been lost. But neither has been done. God has not taken away their ancient privilege; nor has he abolished his gracious covenant with the father of the faithful. On the contrary, he has expressly taught us in his word, that it remains in full force, and, consequently, that children retain their covenant-relation to him. It follows, then, from these facts, that children, under the present dispensation, are members of the church. For certainly their relation to God, arising out of their covenant-interest, is the very same relation which was constituted between God and Jewish children, by their covenant-interest: and as this relation made the *latter*, so it must make the *former*, members of his church.

When Gentile children were brought into the covenant, by the conversion of their parents from idols

to the God of Israel, their right to be members of his church, was acknowledged by circumcision. How unreasonable, then, to dispute the membership of Christian children, who, like Abraham's natural seed, are *born* in the covenant! The church, it is true, is no longer under the law of Moses, and has experienced in her form of government, and modes of worship, a most beneficial and glorious change. But, she is still, as has been proved, the same church; the Christian being only a continuation of the Jewish church, in a state highly improved with respect to light, privileges, and grace. And shall we, merely on account of this great, but advantageous alteration in external matters, cast our dear offspring over her sacred enclosure, as aliens; although her glorious Head assures us, that they retain their ancient relation to himself, and enjoy an interest in that very covenant, by which his church was established in the family of Abraham, "who is the father of us all,"* and which still remains as her grand constitution? Surely the increase of privilege was intended for the benefit of every class of her members; and children have a right, as well as their parents, to share in favours bestowed by our Lord on his whole church.

Is not this sufficient to evince the membership of children in the church of Christ? Will any resolve not to be satisfied, unless a passage be produced, saying, in so many words, Children are

* Rom. iv. 16.

members of the church? We confess no such text can be found: and these persons must be left to consequences resulting from their unreasonable demands. But we can produce a passage, which ought to be regarded as equivalent. Here it is: "*Jesus said, Suffer the LITTLE CHILDREN to come unto me, and forbid them not: FOR OF SUCH IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD.*"* The kingdom of God means the *church* of God. See Mat. xii. 28, xxi. 43. Mark i. 14. Acts viii. 12. xx. 25. xxviii. 31. Here, then, our Lord tells us, that little children belong to his church. Change, in this text, only one word for another of the same meaning, and it will read thus: "*Jesus said, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the church of God.*" Is not this a plain scriptural proof of the church-membership of children? Can any reasonably ask for a plainer one? Are they determined not to be satisfied, unless inspiration use words which they choose to dictate?

I am aware, that some endeavour to set aside this explicit testimony of our Lord in favour of the right of his people's offspring. But the construction which they put on his words, is wholly inadmissible. It destroys the force of his argument. They assert he does not mean, that little children belong to the kingdom or church of God, but adult believers, who resemble little children in their temper. Apply this interpretation to the argument. It

* Mark x. 14.

will stand thus: Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for such adults as resemble them, belong to the kingdom of God. What an argument! Is the likeness of believers, in humility and meekness, to children, a reason why little children should be brought to Christ? Believers, in their disposition, resemble sheep and doves; and therefore, it will, according to this argument, follow, that these animals should be brought to Christ. This construction, you see, destroys both the force and the propriety of our Lord's reason, for permitting children to have access to him.

Now, try the argument by our interpretation of his words, and you will perceive his reason to be just, forcible, and conclusive. Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for *they* belong to the kingdom of God. They are members of my church; and, therefore, they have a right to come to her glorious Head: their parents may, with great propriety, bring them to me for my blessing; and those who forbid them to come, and prevent their access to me, deprive them of a right which I have granted.

Besides, the original will not bear the other construction. "I cannot," says the candid and learned Doct. Doddridge, on this text, "approve of rendering τῶν ὁμοίων *such as resemble these*. It is the part of a faithful translator not to limit the sense of the original, nor to fix what it leaves ambiguous."

These two important points have, I think, been fairly and solidly established:

1. Children have an interest in the covenant of Abraham;

2. Children are members of the church of Christ.

From these premises, we infer their *divine right* to baptism. . But, before I advance in my argument, an objection must be refuted.

We are denied the privilege of deducing our children's right from fair principles. You have no express precept, nor plain apostolic example for infant baptism, say its opponents: and, as baptism is a positive ordinance, you may not prove the right of children to it by inference and moral considerations. Yet these very persons often find it very convenient, and sometimes really necessary, to reason in this way: and, when it serves their purpose, do not hesitate to use the privilege denied to us. A writer of reputation* has published two duodecimo volumes on the subject of baptism: although he has laid it down as a maxim, that, with respect to this ordinance, it is unlawful to deduce consequences from remote principles; and that the right of no person, not established by express precept, or plain apostolic example, may be made out by inferential considerations. You may well wonder, how he could contrive to make his work so bulky, while he cramped his reasoning faculties by such a maxim! The fact is, he has not regarded it: he has violated it in many instances.

* Booth

This rule, laid down by writers on the opposite side of the question, is highly unreasonable and arbitrary. A right established by inference from solid principles, is not to be disputed. Our opponents admit it, *in fact*, with regard to female communicants. No express precept, nor plain apostolic example, can be pleaded for the admission of women to the Lord's supper. Their right to approach is deduced from moral considerations: it is inferred from their qualifications. They are believers, and have, therefore, as good a right to commune with their Saviour, as male believers. On this ground, and no other, are they admitted to the holy table. And, indeed, this maxim is daily violated by its avowed friends. A, B, and C, apply for baptism. The question is, Have they a right to it? How is this question to be determined? It will not be pretended, that A, B, and C, are mentioned, *by name*, in scripture, as having a right to the ordinance. The scriptures recognise, with respect to adults, *only* the right of believers. Hence, the advocates of this maxim are compelled to examine these applicants, on their religious experience, with a view to ascertain whether they be believers. The examination being finished, they conclude, that A, B, and C, have experienced a work of grace on their hearts, have repented of their sins, and exercised a true faith. On this discovery they reason thus: The apostles baptized believers; these applicants are believers; therefore, they have a right to bap-

tism. The reasoning is short; but not shorter than ours in favour of children. We reason thus: The apostles baptized members of the church; infants are members of the church; therefore, infants have a right to baptism.

Who can deprive us of the privilege of pleading the cause of our offspring by fair arguments? Surely *we* have as just a right to reason on the subject of baptism, as *others* who use it, their own maxim notwithstanding. We know that our practice is correct, because an apostle has set us the example. When the Holy Ghost fell on Cornelius, the Roman centurion, and his friends, a new case occurred, involving a question relative to baptism. What shall be done to these men? Shall they be baptized? Peter determines the question. How? By pleading the original commission to baptize *all nations*? No: he appears to have forgotten it, or, at least, not to have understood its extent: for if he had, there would have been no necessity for a vision to induce him to comply with the centurion's invitation to visit him.* It is certain, Peter does not determine the question, by recurring to his commission; for the sacred narrative says not a word about it. How, then, is it done? By violating this maxim, invented to excommunicate infants from the church of God; by urging an argument founded on the qualifications of these heathen for baptism. He sees them to be fit subjects for this ordinance; and from their fit-

* Acts x. 9—20, 28

ness, he infers their right. “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have *received the Holy Ghost as well as we?*”* His argument is: All Jewish converts, receiving the Holy Ghost, have a right to baptism; these men have received the Holy Ghost; therefore, they have a right to baptism. This argument satisfied Peter and his circumcised companions. “He commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.”†

Authorized by apostolic example, we are determined to assert our privilege. Our principles are sound; and our conclusion is incontrovertible. Infants are in covenant with God, and members of his church. Hence, we infer their divine right to baptism; because it is our Lord’s will, that all members of his church should be baptized. Adults, not descended from Christian parents, having by faith gained an interest in this covenant, and become the children of Abraham, and made a credible profession of religion, are regularly introduced to church-fellowship by baptism; (Compare Acts ii. 41 with the 47th verse;) and shall we refuse baptism to infants *born* in covenant with God, *born* children of Abraham, *born* members of the church? Shall we refuse to them the *token* of the covenant, the *seal* of their father, the *sign* of fellowship in Christ’s church? How unjust would it be thus to deprive helpless infants, who cannot plead their own cause, of their *birth-right!* to cast them out of that holy

* Acts x. 47.

† Acts x. 48.

society, in which their heavenly Father has recorded *their names!* to deny *their relation* to God, secured to them by his immutable covenant! We dare not treat, in this cruel and unjust manner, those little children who, Christ assures us, *belong* to his kingdom, his visible church on earth. We joyfully acknowledge their relation to him, and publicly recognise it, by "baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

Here, my brethren, the matter might be rested. The conclusion in favour of our children is built on solid principles. Permit, me, however, to strengthen it, by presenting you with additional evidence in support of their right. We undertake to prove, *That baptism is, in fact, THE CHRISTIAN SEAL of Abraham's covenant.* If this point be established, should not every objection against infant baptism be silent? We offer the following arguments:

If baptism be not a seal to this covenant, it has no initial seal:—Baptism seals the grand promise and leading benefits, and imposes the duties, of this covenant:—An inspired writer teaches us, that baptism has come in place of circumcision:—Baptism is a seal of the covenant of grace. The discussion of these points, I reserve for my next letter.

LETTER IX.

The subject resumed. Children have a divine right to baptism.—Baptism a seal of Abraham's covenant.—Observations on the nature of baptism.

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN,

IN my last was laid before you the result of the several truths, illustrated and established in the preceding letters. It was evinced, from the covenant-interest, and the church-membership of children, that they have a divine right to baptism. I now undertake to prove baptism to be the Christian seal of Abraham's covenant.

1. BAPTISM MUST BE ITS SEAL, OR IT HAS NO INITIAL SEAL. Circumcision was originally appended to this covenant as its token or seal. But, the use of circumcision having, by express direction from heaven, been abolished, it has, under the present economy, no seal; unless baptism have assumed the place of circumcision. Can this be admitted, by any one acquainted with God's gracious dealings with the church—that his covenant, so long confirmed by an appointed seal, has been deprived of it, and left to operate without such an assistance to his people's faith? How contrary would this be to all former analogy! Did God make a covenant with our

first parents? It was confirmed by suitable seals; by “*the tree of life*,” and “*the tree of knowledge of good and evil*.”* Did he make a covenant with mankind and with all flesh, that the earth should never be again destroyed by a deluge? He appointed his *bow in the cloud* as a confirming sign; that, whenever mankind beheld it arching the sky, they might be reminded of his gracious promise, and be assured of its faithfulness.† Did he make a covenant with Abraham? It was confirmed by the rite of circumcision. Did he make a covenant with his people Israel, at Mount Sinai? It was confirmed to them by the blood of calves and of goats.‡ Has he made a covenant of grace with his church? It was confirmed, under the former economy, by appointed signs; and, under the present, it is confirmed by baptism and the Lord's supper.

Now, when we consider, that it has been the uniform practice of the Most High in his dealings with mankind, to annex to every covenant made with them a confirming sign; can it be admitted, that he has not substituted, in the place of circumcision, abolished by the introduction of Christianity, a seal to confirm his covenant with Abraham and his seed? What reason could be assigned for such a strange anomaly in divine procedure? Not the abolition of visible signs and seals under the Christian dispensation: for baptism and the Lord's supper are both visible signs; and, being signs, they must be seals.

* Gen. ii. 9, 16, 17. † Gen. ix. 9—17. ‡ Heb. ix. 18—20.

The cup, used in the latter ordinance, is expressly called “*the NEW TESTAMENT in the blood of Christ;*”* that is, a sign and seal of it: for, as the emblem of his blood, it does in a *figure* what his blood did in *fact*,—ratify and seal the New Testament. There are, then, two visible, confirming signs under the present economy: and yet, as some say, the covenant of Abraham has no seal! Strange indeed! Who can believe it?

If this be fact, then has God put it out of the power of his church to obey an express command of his covenant: “My covenant shall be *in your flesh* for an everlasting covenant.”† Observe, it is not said, *Circumcision*, but “*My covenant,*” that is, the *token* of it, “shall be *in your flesh.*” Now, as long as circumcision was in use, this command made it the church’s duty to circumcise her members. But circumcision has been abolished by positive precept. If, therefore, baptism be not the covenant-token, obedience to this command, in regard to children, is impossible. The covenant is everlasting; it exists under the present economy: but the impression of it is not seen in the flesh of God’s people! But admit baptism to be the Christian seal of it, and obedience to this explicit command becomes practicable. The covenant of Jehovah appears still, in the flesh of his people, as an everlasting covenant: they are impressed with its new token, being washed with the water of baptism.‡

* 1 Cor. xi. 25.

† Gen. xvii. 13

‡ See Witsius on the covenants,
vol III. p. 385.

2. BAPTISM, IN FACT, SEALS THE GRAND PROMISE AND LEADING BENEFITS OF THIS COVENANT, AND IMPOSES THE VERY DUTIES WHICH IT REQUIRES. The administration of it is accompanied with these solemn and significant words: "*I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*" What is the import of this sacred form? "Here," a writer justly observes, "the blessed God is revealed, under the Paternal name, as the object of repentance and mercy; under the Filial character, as the immediate object of confidence for pardon, peace, and protection; under the denomination of the Holy Spirit, as the object of dependence for illumination, sanctification, and consolation."* Here God exhibits himself as reconciling sinners to himself through Jesus Christ, his Son. His language to every baptized person, is, I will, according to the tenor of my covenant, be a God to thee: for, surely, the exhibition which Jehovah here makes of himself as the fountain of happiness and source of pardoning mercy, is the same as that which he makes of himself in the gospel; and the promise, sealed by this rite, must be that which is made known by the gospel. What is this promise? "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and *I will be their God, and they shall be my people.* Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you; and will be a

* Booth, vol. II, p. 306.

Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”* It is plain, then, from the obvious import of the sacred form in which it is administered, that baptism makes precisely the same exhibition of God, which is made in the Abrahamic covenant, and seals the very promise which it contains.

More particularly: Baptism signifies and seals the leading benefits of this covenant. Is union to the church of God one of its benefits? Baptism is connected with it: “Then they that gladly received his word, were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them (the church, Acts ii. 47) about three thousand souls.”† For by one Spirit are we baptized into *one body*, whether we be Jews or Gentiles:‡ that is, *externally* into the visible church, by water-baptism; and *spiritually*, into the mystical body of Christ, by the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Is the righteousness of faith, or the forgiveness of sins, a benefit of this covenant? Baptism is connected with it: “Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins.” Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”§ Is sanctification a benefit of this covenant? Baptism is connected with it: “But according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”** Is the

* 2 Cor. vi. 16—18. † Acts ii. 41, 42. ‡ 1 Cor. xii. 13. Rom. vi. 3.

§ Acts ii. 38, and xxii. 16. ** Tit. iii. 5. 1 Pet. iii. 21.

gift of the Holy Spirit a benefit of this covenant? Baptism is connected with it: "Repent and be baptized—and ye shall receive the *gift of the Holy Ghost.*"*

From these quotations, it appears, that the inspired writers have established a connexion between baptism and the leading benefits of Abraham's covenant. But what is the nature of this connexion? Unquestionably that which subsists between a blessing and a sign; for baptism is a visible sign: and being a sign of these benefits, it must be a *seal* of them; because a sign is given to confirm any promise or grant to which it is applied.†

Let us consider the duties imposed by this sacred rite of our holy religion. What are they? None

* Acts ii. 38.

† The last text quoted is followed by these memorable words; "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." In explaining this passage, some maintain, that Peter refers to the grand promise in Abraham's covenant, and, consequently, that an immediate connexion is here established between this covenant and baptism. But those who would destroy this connexion, so fatal to their cause, contend that the apostle refers to the promise of the Spirit. Let us grant what they demand; let us admit that Peter is speaking of this promise: still the connexion between baptism and Abraham's covenant, can be fairly demonstrated from *this text*; because the promise recorded in Joel was included in that covenant, and, when delivered by the prophet, was only a development of its unsearchable riches. St. Paul, treating of this covenant, enumerates among the blessings of Abraham, the promise of the Spirit: "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the *promise of the Spirit*

will deny the subject to be dedicated to that Supreme Being, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in whose name he is baptized; and that baptism binds upon him, in a most solemn manner, the great duties of a living faith, repentance unfeigned, and new obedience. Now, these are the very duties which the covenant, made with the father of the faithful, imposes on every covenantee.† They were summarily stated, in those emphatical words with which the Most High introduced this memorable transaction: “*Walk before me, and be thou perfect:*” and they are stated, by a writer of the New Testament, in language equally emphatical, and somewhat similar, as the known obligation of baptism: “*Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Christ, were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should WALK in newness of life.*”‡

Now, can a doubt remain whether baptism is a seal of Abraham’s covenant? It seals its grand promise and leading benefits; and it imposes its great duties. It must, therefore, be a *seal* to this COVENANT.

3. We are taught by an inspired instructor, THAT BAPTISM HAS COME IN PLACE OF CIRCUMCISION:

through faith.* Baptism, then, being connected with this promise, must necessarily be connected with the *covenant* to which the promise belongs.

* Gal. iii. 14.

† See Letter VII.

‡ Rom. vi. 3, 4.

*In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, BY THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST; BURIED WITH HIM IN BAPTISM, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.**

That we may take a fair view of the evidence contained in this text, it will be necessary to consider the object and scope of the apostle's reasoning. The Colossian converts were, like other primitive believers, exposed to danger arising from two quarters: the influence of Judaizing teachers, who corrupted the simplicity of the gospel, by compounding it with the law of Moses; and the influence of professing Christians, who corrupted it, by mixing it with the tenets of Pagan philosophy. Hence, the great object of Paul was to preserve their faith unadulterated by the errors of either class of teachers. To gain his object, he exhibits the Lord Jesus, in all his mediatorial glories, as "the image of the invisible God;" as the Creator of all things, visible and invisible; as reconciling heaven and earth, by the blood of his cross: and then assures them, that, in so glorious a Mediator, in whom "dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," they were complete; not needing the aid of those dependencies which false teachers proposed, but which the gospel, so far from recommending, discountenanced and

* Col. ii. 11, 12.

condemned. And he particularly disproves the necessity of circumcision, on which the advocates of Moses, so much and so earnestly, insisted; by showing, *first*, that they had the thing signified by circumcision: “*In whom ye also are circumcised,*” &c. v. 11—and, *then*, that the external rite, *baptism*, is, under the new, what circumcision was under the old, dispensation; namely, *a sign and a seal of the covenant*: “*Buried with him in baptism,*” &c. v. 12. Both parts were necessary to complete his argument, and make it conclusive. For had the apostle only said, that believers in Christ have the thing signified, the circumcision of the heart; the advocates of Moses might have replied, Admitting this truth, it does not, in the least, militate against the outward rite, the sign of a work of grace in the heart. Abraham was a gracious person, circumcised in heart, long before the institution of circumcision: and, if possession of the thing signified, by the father of the faithful, did not supersede the use of an external sign, how can it prove a sign to be unnecessary to his children? This objection the apostle anticipates: and he removes it, by showing, that baptism now does the office of circumcision, exhibiting and sealing the same covenant-benefits.

We find, in this text, a further confirmation of the substitution of the Christian for the Jewish rite. Baptism is denominated *the circumcision of Christ*. That the inspired writer means by this phrase, neither our Lord’s personal circumcision, nor the

spiritual circumcision of his disciples, but Christian baptism, is evident from the twelfth verse, in which he explains this to be the signification. I am aware, that to this interpretation it may be objected: Baptism is made by hands; and the apostle is speaking of a circumcision made without hands. But the force of the objection will be dissipated, if it be considered that he speaks, first, of the *thing signified*, a work of grace on the heart, denominated "circumcision made without hands;" and, then, of the sign of this work, which he terms, *The circumcision of Christ*.

This passage is similar to one in Peter. Speak of the ark, he says, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us, (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Here baptism is considered as instrumental in effecting the answer of a good conscience; which is as much a work made without hands, as spiritual circumcision, "the putting off the body of the sins of the flesh." In the text under discussion, baptism is presented in the same light; as instrumental in producing the circumcision of the heart.

This passage may be paraphrased thus: "In whom," that is, Christ, to whom you are united by faith, "ye are circumcised with the" spiritual "circumcision" of the heart, "made without hands," by the grace of God, which consists "in putting off the

body of the sins of the flesh:" and this spiritual work, although wrought by the immediate agency of God's Holy Spirit, yet is instrumentally effected by that external ordinance which exhibits and seals this benefit of the covenant; and which, being in import the same with the Jewish rite, may very properly be called, "*The circumcision of Christ.*" I mean the ordinance of baptism, in which you were "*buried with him, and wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God,*" &c.

4. BAPTISM MUST BE A SEAL OF ABRAHAM'S COVENANT, BECAUSE IT IS A SEAL OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE. To prove baptism to be a seal of the latter, I refer you to those texts quoted in page 132, to evince that it signifies and seals *union to the church, the righteousness of faith, sanctification, and the gift of the Holy Ghost*; acknowledged benefits of the covenant of grace. Now, if this Christian rite be a seal to these its leading benefits, it must be a seal of the covenant itself.

There is yet another passage of sacred scripture that strongly confirms this truth. It records the commission which Jesus Christ gave to his apostles: "Go ye, therefore, and teach (*disciple*) all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Here, baptism and teaching are

closely connected. Baptism is a sensible and visible sign. Of what is it the sign? Unquestionably of something exhibited and inculcated in the teaching of these divinely commissioned instructors. What did they exhibit? The covenant of grace, and its glorious benefits. *These* they held forth to the view of mankind, as the astonishing result of the contrivance and love of the SACRED THREE, in whose name they baptized, displayed in man's redemption; and *these* they pressed mankind to accept, by declaring how freely they were offered, and that the vilest of our apostate race might make them his own, by receiving them with a cordial faith: and to confirm their belief in the covenant, and encourage them to confide in the mercy, grace, and love of God, they applied to believers that visible, confirming sign, appointed by the great Redeemer. What did they inculcate? In general, obedience to that Supreme Being, whose name is *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*; in particular, all the duties of the covenant of grace, as we find them specified, recommended, and enforced in the gospel: and to bind these upon the consciences of mankind, with the greater solemnity and force, they applied to them the appointed, visible, confirming sign. Thus, the heavenly messengers baptized their converts, in *token of those benefits of the covenant of grace which they exhibited, and of those duties of it which they inculcated.*

Baptism, then, is a seal of the covenant of grace; and, consequently, a seal of Abraham's covenant: because they are in substance the same.*

On the supposition of these being *two* covenants, it may be objected, that, although baptism is a seal of one, it cannot be, at the same time, a seal to both. But the objection is unfounded; because, on the very same ground, it might be contended, that circumcision could not have been a seal both of the Abrahamic, and of the Sinai-covenants: whereas it is certain, from scripture testimony, that it did, in fact, perform this *two fold office*. And if circumcision sealed two covenants, *so widely different*, why may not baptism seal two, *substantially the same*; especially when it is considered, that the church is now placed under the operation of both?

Let me, my brethren, recall to your recollection the important points established in the two last, and in a preceding letter,† and present to your view their combined evidence.

It has been proved,

1. That children have an interest in Abraham's covenant:

2. That children are members of Christ's church: and

3. That baptism is a seal of this covenant, and a token of church-membership.

Now, from these premises, the conclusion follows, with the evidence of a demonstration, *That children have a DIVINE RIGHT to baptism.*

* See Letter VII. page 109—115.

† Letter VI.

Here is the foundation on which we place this great truth, so precious to those who understand the nature of that all-gracious covenant, which, from the day of its establishment, with our father Abraham, has looked, with benignant smiles, upon the offspring of God's people. A truth, not to be overturned by petty objections, springing from contracted views of Jehovah's dispensations towards his church. While the foundation remains, the building is secure. For, to allow the premises, and deny the conclusion; to admit the covenant-interest, and church-membership of children, and dispute their right to the token of the one, and seal of the other; would be utterly inconsistent. These things are inseparably connected, and must exist or perish together: and, before children can be deprived of their right to baptism, it must be proved, that God has excluded them from his church, and cast them out of his covenant. But to prove this, it may, I think, in view of the evidence submitted in these letters, be, without presumption, pronounced, not only *impracticable*, but *impossible*.

I close this letter, by deducing from what has been said, a few observations on the nature of baptism.

In all cases, whether applied to adults, or to infants, baptism is a seal of the covenant. It is wrong to consider it on God's part, as sealing the recipient's faith, or, in other words, as certifying him that he is a true believer. The ordinance may *in-*

directly serve to strengthen a person's persuasion that he has a true faith, by proving the means of exciting this grace into more vigorous exercise: but, then, let it be observed, his evidence is derived, not from the ordinance, but from the spiritual exercises of his own heart. He concludes himself to be a believer, not because he has been baptized, but because he feels in himself, the holy workings of a living faith. Baptism was not given by our Lord to his church to be a seal of faith in any. The question whether we are believers or not, must be decided by other evidence. He gave baptism simply as a *seal* of his covenant; both to assure us of the faithfulness of his promises, and to impress, the more deeply on our hearts, a sense of the duties which we owe to our covenant-God.

Hence we see, that, in all cases, baptism seals the *truth*. It can never be affixed to a falsehood; because it is always affixed to Jehovah's covenant, which contains nothing but truth. Viewed in this, its proper, light, we feel no difficulty in explaining its import. It certifies the subject, that he is in covenant with God; that he is a member of the visible church; that Jehovah will certainly fulfil his covenant-engagements. It certifies, that covenant-obligations are on the person baptized; that he is bound to repent of his sins, believe in Christ, and walk uprightly before God: and it certifies, that if he, by the aids of divine grace, fulfil these duties, Jehovah will certainly be his God, in the highest

sense of his promise; by forgiving his sins, justifying him freely through the righteousness of Christ, sanctifying him by his Spirit, and finally receiving him to glory. All this it certifies; because all this is included in that covenant which it, as a seal, confirms.

But, it may be asked, Did not Abraham receive circumcision as a seal of the righteousness of faith? Did it not certify him, that he was a justified person and a true believer? The apostle's phrase to which these questions refer, seems to be greatly misunderstood by some. The sacred writer, I apprehend, does not intend to teach us, that circumcision was given to the patriarch as a seal of his *faith*, and as such to certify him *directly* that he was a true believer: for, you will observe, he does not say, *he received it as a seal of his FAITH*, but *he received it as a seal of the RIGHTEOUSNESS of the faith which he had*. Between these forms of expression, there is a manifest difference.

If we recur to Moses' account of the original institution of circumcision, we shall find not the slightest intimation given that it was proposed to the patriarch as a seal of his faith. It was presented to him simply as a seal of the covenant then made with him: "*It shall be a token,*" says God, "*of the covenant betwixt me and thee.*" The transaction of that memorable day, no doubt, served to confirm Abraham in the persuasion of his being a true believer. He was then taken into a covenant

with Almighty God, formally made and ratified by a visible sign; and, in that covenant, he was constituted father of an innumerable spiritual seed, for the great purpose of transmitting to them the blessings of salvation. Such was the honour conferred upon him. From these distinguishing favours of Jehovah, he might, and certainly did, derive additional assurance of his having the grace of faith, and consequent reconciliation with God. But of this fact, which might be thus inferred, circumcision was not intended to be the seal.

How, then, it may be asked, was this sign to Abraham, “a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had?” The question has already been answered. It sealed the *blessing* to him, by sealing the covenant which contained it. This covenant exhibited, among other benefits, *the righteousness of faith*, or, in other words, justification by faith in the righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ: it engaged, that Abraham and all true believers should be made righteous, by this glorious righteousness of Christ, received by faith. This truth, this benefit, this covenant-engagement, circumcision sealed: and, thus, it was to Abraham “a seal of the *righteousness of the faith which he had.*”

This construction of the apostle’s phrase, evidently accords with the scope of his reasoning in the context. He is proving the great doctrine of justification by faith, without works. In confirmation of it, he adduces the case of Abraham, and

shows that *he* was justified in this way: and to evince that the benefit of justification did not belong exclusively to his natural descendants, he shows that Abraham had received it when uncircumcised, and that circumcision was given to him, not to introduce a new, but to confirm the old, method of salvation: “for the promise,” or *covenant*; which circumcision sealed, “that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but *through the* RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH.”*

Hence, it appears that the import of circumcision was to Abraham and to his seed the same: being to both a *token of the covenant*, a *seal of all its engagements and obligations*, and especially a *seal of the great doctrine or promise of justification by faith*, or, to use the apostle's words, *by the righteousness of faith.*” It exhibited to all this great blessing: it certified all, that God would justify every true believer through the merits of Christ.

Baptism, being substituted for circumcision, exhibits the same blessing; it certifies the same truth; it confirms the same covenant-engagements and obligations: it is a *seal of the righteousness of faith to every baptized person.*

We, therefore, repeat it: In no case can baptism, considered as God's seal, be a seal to a falsehood. It may be erroneously applied; it may be adminis-

* Rom. iv. 13. See page 74.

tered, through mistake, to persons not entitled to it: but it *always* seals the truth; because it is always the seal of God's covenant, the engagements and promises of which are "true and righteous altogether."

Viewing baptism in this light, it is evident that no objection against its application to infants, can be derived from the nature of the truth and promises which it certifies.

The language of this Christian rite is the same to every recipient, whether adult or infant: Jehovah justifies, through the merits of his Son, every true believer, and becomes to him a God in the sublimest sense of his covenant-promise.

LETTER X.

OBJECTIONS ANSWERED. 1. *Incapacity of children.*—2. *Silence of the New Testament.*—3. *Source of proof remote.*

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN,

IN the course of our discussion, several important objections have been answered. There are others on which great dependence is placed, by those who controvert the right of infants, and condemn the

application of baptism to them as an unscriptural practice. The principal of these will now be examined.

1. An objection, of a plausible nature, is derived from the incapacity of children to act in this ordinance. 'Infants,' say our opponents, 'cannot repent, nor exercise faith; how absurd, then, to apply to them a rite which requires the performance of these sacred duties?'

We reply, that if, on account of the incapacity of infants, their baptism is absurd, for the same reason their circumcision must have been absurd; because the former is now the token of that very covenant, and the seal of those very duties, which the latter, while in use, signified and sealed. The incapacity of infants under the Jewish economy, was the same as under the Christian dispensation. No one will pretend that they could perform duties *then*, for which they are incompetent *now*. Are our tender offspring unconscious of what is done to them, when we dedicate them to God in baptism? Equally unconscious were Jewish infants, when dedicated to him by circumcision. Are our children unable to accept of covenant-mercy? So were Jewish children. Are our infants incapable of performing the great duties of repentance, faith, and new obedience, imposed by the covenant, and confirmed by baptism? Circumcised infants were under the same obligations, and as incapable of doing these momentous duties. We, therefore, conclude, that,

if the circumcision of children was not absurd, then their baptism is not absurd; and that, if the application of the ancient covenant-token to them, was a reasonable service, then the application of the new covenant-token must be a reasonable service.

“But,” it will be said, “faith is required *in order to baptism.*” This we admit to be true with regard to *adults*; but we deny it with respect to *infants*. The rule for applying the covenant-token, is the same under the Christian, as it was under the Jewish, dispensation. Faith is now the door by which the heathen enter into Abraham’s covenant; and, as this covenant is precisely what it ever was, faith must always have been the door of admission to adults.* Of adults, then, faith was required in order to circumcision: but was this qualification required, under the Jewish economy, from infants in order to their being ranked among the patriarch’s seed? Every body acquainted with the subject knows and admits, that it was not; and that they entered with their parents into the church of God, and received the sign of circumcision. Why, then, should we exact from infants now, what was not formerly exacted? Why refuse to apply to them baptismal water, because they are incapable of performing an act, which is demanded, not from them, but from adults, as a prerequisite to the reception of this Christian rite?

* See Witsius concerning proselytes, p. 363, vol. iii.

This is perfectly tenable. But in order to support our conclusion with still greater evidence, let us take ground which none can dispute. It is admitted, that before an adult heathen could be circumcised and received into the Jewish church, it was required of him to renounce idolatry, and profess himself a worshipper of the God of Israel. Less than this, all must confess, could not have been exacted, with any consistency with the nature of Abraham's covenant. But were Gentile-children capable of making this renunciation, and this profession? or were these demanded from them as prerequisites to an interest in the covenant, and union with the church? To assert the latter would be grossly false; and to maintain the former would be an offence against common sense. Here, then, is decisive evidence that, under the Jewish dispensation, something was demanded of adults as indispensably necessary to the reception of circumcision, when nothing was required of infants to entitle them to it, except the covenant-right of their parents. Thus stands the matter under the Christian economy. Faith in Jesus Christ is necessary to give an adult a just claim to baptism; but it were absurd to exact this from new-born children. They now acquire a right to the token of the covenant, just as they did formerly,—through their parents. And it is as unjust to demand from them faith, as a necessary qualification for this Christian rite, because it is required as such from adults; as it would have

been, in the Jewish church, to refuse to circumcise them, until they made a renunciation of idolatry, and a profession of being worshippers of Jehovah, because these were the requisite qualifications in their parents.

The very passage on which our opponents take their stand, furnishes additional proof in favour of our position. The text is this: "*He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.*"* Here, say they, faith is demanded as a necessary prerequisite to baptism. But how do they prove this round assertion? The passage itself does not say, *that baptism shall be applied to none but believers; but only, "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved."* The difference between these two forms of expression, is great and manifest. How, then, I repeat it, do our opponents attempt to prove their position? By inference! In this text mention is made, first, of *faith*, and then, of *baptism*; the latter, in the order of arrangement, following the former: hence, they conclude, that baptism in the administration, should always follow faith in the recipient. Thus, in laying down one rule, they are compelled to violate another, and a favourite too, that it is not lawful to reason on the subject of a positive ordinance! But, granting them the liberty of reasoning, although they deny it to us, let us try the soundness of the rule deduced from this text.

* Mark xvi. 16.

Look again, my brethren, at the passage, and you will see *believing* standing before, not only baptism, but also *salvation*. If, therefore, it be correct to conclude, from this arrangement, that none may be baptized but those who believe; it must likewise be correct, for the same reason, to conclude, that none can be saved but *those who believe*. What, then, becomes of all who die in infancy? They cannot exercise faith. Are they lost?

Read once more this text, and you will see *baptism* placed, in order, before *salvation*. It follows, therefore, according to the reasoning of our opponents, that none can be saved, *unless they be baptized*. Then all belonging to that society of Christians who renounce baptism, perish! and *faith* itself cannot save them! And what is still more deplorable, this reasoning will prove fatal to the mass of professing Christians; for they are unbaptized, if immersion be, as our brethren say, the only valid mode of administering this sacred rite! What consequences, fairly deducible from the principle, on which the rule we combat is founded!

You will not, my brethren, imagine that I can, for a moment, believe, that our opponents carry their principle so far, as to adopt these consequences as articles of their creed. My object has been to prove the rule, which is connected with such terrible results, to be erroneous and absurd. In fact, merely from the order in which the particulars, in this text, are distributed, we cannot, with certainty, conclude

even that faith is a requisite qualification for adult baptism. This we learn from other parts of holy scripture.

Further: Let it be observed, that the very advocates of this rule are compelled to depart from the literal meaning of the passage on which it is founded. Why do they baptize an adult person? Because they know him to be a true believer? This, it is impossible for them to know with certainty, without an immediate revelation from heaven. God alone can search the heart. They, as the apostles of our Lord did, must administer the ordinance on a credible profession of faith: and, hence, as the apostles, they are liable to be deceived by a false profession. Alas! how many lamentable proofs have occurred among that, as well as other denominations, to show how easy it is for dishonest men to impose on the ministers of Christ! It is absolutely necessary to accept of a credible profession of faith, as sufficient to entitle to baptism; because if this were rejected, and certain evidence of grace required, the ordinance would never be administered; owing to the utter incapacity of mortals to discover such evidence, and act under such a rule. From the nature of the case, we and others are compelled to judge of the state of applicants for baptism by external evidence; and to admit them to it, on a profession of religion supported by a consistent conduct. This is our rule; and it a good and scriptural rule.

But observe, my brethren, the text under consideration speaks, not of a *profession of faith*, but of *real faith*. It does not say, He that *professes* to believe, but he that *believeth*, and is baptized, shall be saved. Evidently, then, our opponents depart, in administering baptism, from the *literal* sense of this passage, on which they ground a rule to exclude infants from an important privilege. And what is still more remarkable, they take this liberty with a text, which, in reference to adults and their salvation, will admit of no deviation from its strict and proper meaning: for it is certain, that, although a profession of faith is, and must necessarily be, accepted, as sufficient to entitle a person, in the view of man, to baptism, yet nothing less than a *real and living faith* can save his soul. It will not, however, follow, that, in reference to this ordinance, we are to interpret the text in the same rigorous way, as if baptism were absolutely necessary to salvation; because our Saviour himself guards against this construction, by leaving out mention of baptism in the close: "He that believeth not shall be damned."

On the whole, from this passage, as already intimated, no general rule, in respect to qualifications for baptism, to direct the conduct of those who administer it, can be deduced. We can only infer, that, as our Lord has spoken of this ordinance in such solemn connexion with faith and salvation, none should venture to make light of it; but all

should seek the application of it to themselves in a due and scriptural manner.

To set the matter in clearer light, it may be observed, that before the abolition of circumcision, it might, with truth and propriety, have been said, "He that believeth," and *is circumcised*, "shall be saved." But would this mode of expression have established it as a rule, that infants were not to be impressed with the covenant-sign, or that administrators of it could not act, unless they certainly knew the intended subject to be a true believer? Unquestionably not. Such a declaration would have produced no alteration in existing rules relative to circumcision. To learn, therefore, our Lord's will in regard to the application of baptism, we must consult other passages of his statute-book, and the conduct of his apostles, in connexion with the uniform practice of his church, under the ancient economy, in applying the token of his covenant.

Finally: In reply to this objection, it may be justly observed, that it is, not only unfounded, but rash; because, as we have seen, it applies with equal force against infant circumcision which was expressly ordered by infinite wisdom. Indeed, if the principle on which it depends, were correct, it would deprive children of membership in all other societies, as well as of fellowship in the church of God. Duties certainly result from the relations, which members of a family and members of a civil community, sustain to each other; duties, which in-

infants are as incapable of performing, as they are that of faith: and, therefore, it will follow that, if, on account of their incapacity to do this great duty, they cannot be received as members of the church, nor be impressed with the sign of its fellowship; they ought not to be accounted members of any society, the general duties of which they are unable to perform. How absurd would this be! Infants, the moment they come into the world, are members of a family, and citizens of a commonwealth, as really as adult persons: and although, for the present, they can make no return in gratitude, or in doing any other duty, yet they have an indisputable claim to the guardian care and watchful protection of both societies, natural and civil. In like manner, infants are, from their birth, members of the church, and entitled to baptism, the appointed token of her fellowship. This objection, then, is utterly groundless.

2. An objection against infant baptism, is drawn from the supposed silence of the New Testament on the subject. Taking this fact for granted, it is asked, "If children have a right to be admitted to baptism, why do we not find it expressly recognised in the inspired writings? Surely, their admission must be unwarrantable, until it can be justified by some proof that the practice prevailed in apostolic churches.

In reply to this objection, we contend that, if the New Testament be silent with respect to infant

baptism, this silence makes in favour of our sentiment and practice. Let it be recollected, that children were, by express direction of the Most High, admitted members of his church, and had applied to them the token of his covenant, to seal the relations which they sustained to him, and to his people: let it be recollected, that they continued to enjoy this distinguishing privilege, from the time of Abraham to that of our Lord, none venturing to call in question a right so explicitly granted to them by divine authority: and let it be also recollected, that when a Pagan became a convert to the Jewish religion, both he and his children were circumcised in token of their being in covenant with God, and members of his church. Now, it must be conceded, that no human power was competent to deprive children of their covenant-privilege; and that, if it have not been revoked by our Sovereign Lord, from whom it was received, it must remain in their possession as an inalienable inheritance. Has he declared such a revocation? Search the Bible, from beginning to end, and you will not find a single passage, certifying it to his church to be his will, that children should no longer sustain their ancient covenant-relation to his Divine Majesty.

We are required to produce an express command for the baptism of infants. This demand we contend to be highly unreasonable: and, with great propriety, retorting it upon our opponents, say to them, **Produce you an express command for casting infants**

out of the church, and denying them baptism. For we take it to be a position which cannot be fairly refuted, That, unless our Supreme Lord have plainly signified it to be his will, it would be unjust to children, as well as presumptuous opposition to established order in our Master's house, to deprive them of their chartered right, and expel them from his family. How unreasonable, then, to maintain the silence of the New Testament to be a sufficient warrant, for taking away from them an important privilege, enjoyed through a long succession of ages!

Material changes have been made in God's government over his church, and in the prescribed forms of her worship. The Sinai-covenant has passed away, and circumcision been abolished. How were these alterations effected? How was Jehovah's will, relative to these important points, made known to his church? By the *silence* of the New Testament? By no means. He has signified his pleasure plainly and fully. Circumcision was abolished by positive precept: and, although intimations had been given in the Old Testament, that the Levitical priesthood, and the whole economy established by the Sinai-covenant, were of a temporary nature, and designed to last only till they ushered into the world the great High Priest of our profession, and introduced his better dispensation; yet the church was not left to educe the truth from these intimations: An inspired apostle was directed to collect the evidence, and, by his authority, to render the conclusion resulting

from it certain. So plainly has our Lord revealed his will on these points. Dare we, then, deprive children of their ancient inheritance, without a declaration of his will equally plain and express? Who can believe the silence of the New Testament, with respect to their baptism, to be sufficient to authorize the conclusion, that our Master has taken from them a privilege granted by himself, and enjoyed by them during many ages?

“But the apostles,” it may be said, “taught the church, that children were no longer to be recognised as her members.” Where is the proof? Is this, too, found in the silence of the New Testament? The Mosaic economy was vacated by express precept; yet how hard was it to divorce the hearts of Jewish converts from it, although a yoke which they could not bear. What a noise the change excited! How obstinately did the prejudices of education rise in opposition to apostolic authority! Circumcision was abolished; but what a length of time was required to wean Jewish converts from this painful rite! and how had the apostles to exert their authority to prevent the imposition of it on Gentile-Christians! But, with respect to the disfranchisement of children, no difficulty was experienced. The Jews, who had been long accustomed to see them impressed with the seal of God’s covenant, numbered among his people, and regarded as members of his church; saw them deprived of their fairest inheritance, refused the sign of the covenant,

and treated as strangers to it, and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, without murmuring, and without feeling a shock given to their prejudices! So easily was this great revolution in the church effected; a revolution in opposition to parental affection, and the tenderest feelings of the human heart! So easily, that it was unnecessary for the apostles to record a single word on the abolition of children's covenant-privileges! They met with violent and lasting opposition in setting aside the rites of Moses, and the use of circumcision; so that they had to declare, explicitly and often, Jehovah's will on these subjects: but, with respect to cutting off children from the people of God, and denying them the privilege of baptism, they found prejudices fostered by education and daily practice, prejudices that founded themselves on divine authority; so pliant, so yielding, as to render it unnecessary to guard the church, by a written document, against supposing that children were to be treated under the Christian economy, as they had been under the Jewish, and to continue in the enjoyment of their ancient privileges! The silence of the New Testament, (if it be silent,) with respect to infant-baptism, makes, it is evident, strongly in favour of our sentiment and practice; and justifies us in sealing with this ordinance the children of believing parents, as members of the Christian church.

Thus far, I have reasoned on the supposition of this objection being founded on fact. I shall now

endeavour to show, that the New Testament is not silent with respect to infant-baptism, and, consequently, that the objection is entirely groundless. We are ready to concede, no passage can be produced from the inspired writers, saying, in so many words, Baptize infants as well as adults. But because this, or a like form of words, is not used by them, shall we conclude they are entirely silent on the subject; and, because our heavenly Lawgiver has not chosen to employ terms which human wisdom might dictate, he has not signified his will with respect to the privileges of children under the Christian dispensation? This would be most unreasonable and unwarrantable. For, certainly, he has more ways than one in which to communicate his sovereign pleasure: and it is our duty, as obedient subjects, to endeavour to learn his will, however made known; and to obey it when revealed in one form, as well as when revealed in another.

Suppose a king were, by a particular instrument of writing, to declare who should be acknowledged as citizens of a distant province, and to set up a certain form of government over them; suppose this king, many years after, should be induced, from kind regard to his subjects, and with a view to their benefit, to change the form of his government; and suppose that, at the same time, he should declare the instrument relative to citizenship to be unrepealed: would it not be false in any to pretend, that his majesty was silent with respect to a certain

class of citizens under his former government? Would not all reasonable persons admit the will of their sovereign to be signified with sufficient clearness, to determine that no class of his subjects was disfranchised, and that no alteration with respect to citizenship was effected, by the change of his government?

The glorious King of Zion has done all this. In this way has he made known his pleasure in regard to children. The covenant of Abraham is the instrument declaring the right of citizenship, and ascertaining who should be considered as members of God's church. The Mosaic economy was the government once set up by his authority over this distant province of his universal empire; which, after continuing many ages, was exchanged for the Christian dispensation; a new and better form of government, designed, not to abridge, but to increase the privileges and happiness of his subjects. To secure the rights of every class of his citizens, and prevent the exclusion of infants from his church, our sovereign Lord has taught us expressly that the Abrahamic constitution is still in force, and that, in this covenant, his servant was constituted father of all the faithful, Gentiles as well as Jews. Moreover, we are informed in sacred writ, that baptism has come in place of circumcision, and is the Christian seal of that very covenant in which children had, from the beginning, and still have, an interest. We conclude, therefore, that the New Testament is not

silent with respect to infant baptism. Much additional evidence, in favour of this conclusion, will appear, when we come to reply to the objection, that the apostolic writings contain neither express mention of children having been baptized by the founders of the Christian church, nor any positive precept enjoining their baptism. But, previously to taking up that objection, we choose to answer an intermediate one.—It is objected,

2. “That the source of our proof is remote. Why go, say our opponents, to the Old, to learn how to apply an ordinance belonging to the New, Testament? Can that application of it be correct, the justification of which makes it necessary to travel as far back into past ages as the time of Abraham?”

We reply, that the best foundation for the support of any truth, is that which is formed by first principles. Aware of this, an inspired writer, treating of human depravity, contents not himself with collecting the proofs of his doctrine arising from the actual state of mankind in his own day, but ascends to the beginning of the world; and there, in Paradise, lays open the original source of the guilt and sinfulness of our race, by showing that by one man sin entered into the world, through the violation of that gracious covenant which the Almighty condescended to make with Adam, our first parent, as the federal head and representative of all his posterity.* In confirmation of that fundamental

* Rom. v. 12—21.

doctrine of the gospel, justification by faith without works, the same sacred writer traces up the subject in debate to the time of Abraham, and establishes the invaluable truth by evincing, that this patriarch, **THE FRIEND OF GOD**, was justified in this free and gracious manner.* Now, it is presumed, no one who has due regard for apostolic authority and inspired wisdom, will pretend that these arguments have little or no weight, because they are derived from sources so remote in regard to time.

The great apostle of the Gentiles Paul, that correct reasoner, and divinely inspired teacher, has set this example. We humbly endeavour to imitate it. To establish the right of children to membership in the church of God, we trace it up to that memorable period, when it was solemnly granted to them by her glorious Head: we show it to be a right certainly enjoyed by them from the time of our father Abraham; a right, not impaired, but rendered venerable by the lapse of ages, and originally secured to them by a perpetual and unchangeable covenant. And in doing so, we not only imitate the apostle's method of reasoning in the cases just specified, but follow him in that very path which he has marked out for us in regard to a part of our subject. To evince that the blessing of Abraham comes on Gentiles, through Jesus Christ, *he*, in his epistle to the Galatians, proves the perpetuity of the patriarch's covenant.† Here, then, we have an

* Rom. iv. 1—3.

† Gal. iii. 13—18.

infallible guide. We have gone no farther than he leads us. We have followed him to the patriarch's day, when the grand constitution of the church was formed, and the glorious charter of her privileges granted: and, having ascertained that the membership of children was then established, by an unaltered instrument, the pages of which time can never efface; we justly conclude, no mortal power can deprive them of a blessing conferred by the Most High, and that they have a scriptural claim to baptism, the Christian seal of the covenant.

We have more to say in answer to this objection. It depends on a supposition of our having but little to do with the Old Testament; a supposition, which finds no countenance in the apostle's writings, and is productive of errors of very injurious tendency. Against such a sentiment, we enter our solemn protest. What is the rule of faith and practice? The New Testament *only*? By no means. The scriptures both of the Old and of the New Testaments, the writings of the prophets, together with the writings of the apostles, constitute this rule. The BIBLE, containing a divine revelation, delivered to the church by "holy men of God, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," under both dispensations, is the divine standard given to form our sentiments, and to regulate our actions. Against neglecting the first part of this heavenly volume, the writers of the second have cautiously guarded, by referring to it on various occasions; not only to

prove the accomplishment of prophecies, and the fulfilment of types, but also to establish important doctrines and duties. A promise recorded in the Old, is as much an object of our faith, as a promise recorded in the New, Testament: and laws of a general nature published in the former, and not repealed in the latter, retain all their original authority. To endeavour, then, to diminish the respect due to the oracles of divine truth contained in the first part of our sacred volume, is extremely wrong: and that opinion, which cannot be supported but by such unhallowed means, must be false.

Further: The objection which we combat, is grounded on another notion equally erroneous,—that age lessens the authority of divine laws. The obligations arising from statutes enacted by mortals, whose breath is in their nostrils, time may affect: it may at last render them obsolete, and deprive them of all their power. But it were treating with disrespect the majesty of Jehovah, whose nature changes not, and whose authority is ever the same, to imagine that the lapse of ages can impair the obligation resulting from a law given by him to his creatures. They may neglect it, and forget it: but he will neither forget it, nor suffer the violation of it to go unpunished. In the records of heaven, it is written with indelible characters. The moral law, first published in Paradise, speaks to us, their remote descendants, with as much authority as it spoke to our original parents. The penal conse-

quences of breaking the covenant made with them, run parallel with time, and stain with guilt and pollution every child of Adam. Several times, indeed, has the moral law been repeated, and new editions of it given to the world; not, however, because its obligation was weakened by age, but because depraved man is so apt to forget the commandments of God.

Finally: In regard to the particular law in question, which ordained the application of the covenant-seal to infants, let it be observed, that, being in constant operation, it could not be forgotten: and, therefore, when circumcision was abolished and succeeded by baptism, nothing more was necessary to make known to the church the will of her Supreme Head, than for an inspired writer to prove her ancient constitution unrepealed.

LETTER XI.

OBJECTIONS ANSWERED.—4. *Positive precept and express example wanting*—1 Cor. vii. 14, explained.—5. *No obligation arises from infant baptism.*

CHRISTIAN BROTHERS,

LET US resume the subject of our last, and prosecute, in this letter, our answer to objections.

4. Against the practice of infant-baptism, it is objected, “That the New Testament contains neither *positive precept*, nor *express example*, to warrant it.”

In reply to this objection, it might be sufficient to remark, that neither *positive precept* nor *express example* can be found in the New Testament to justify the admission of *females to participate in our Lord's supper*. Yet, no one is extravagant enough to contend, that they should be debarred from the enjoyment of this precious ordinance. Believing in Jesus Christ, women have the qualifications requisite to a worthy approach to his holy table: and, therefore, they ought to be admitted to hold fellowship with that divine Redeemer whom they love, and with his people of whom they constitute so large a part; and, from their manifest right, we just-

ly infer, notwithstanding the want of a particular kind and degree of evidence, that the apostles did not hinder their enjoyment of this important privilege, but freely admitted them to it.

I am aware that the opponents of infant baptism attempt to make out a positive precept for female communion. But the attempt is vain. The whole process of their reasoning, affords demonstrative proof that no such precept exists: because, if it did, no reasoning would be required; it would be sufficient to produce the precept, and let it speak for itself.

Let us now take a different view of this objection. To what, my brethren, does it amount? To nothing more than this: That God has not given as much evidence, or the particular kind of evidence which some wish, and others are unreasonable enough to demand! But, surely this cannot prove, that he has not afforded, in his holy word, evidence which *ought* to convince us that infant baptism is an appointment of his sovereign will. Jesus Christ, says the infidel, did not, after his resurrection, show himself to the Jewish people: but, can it be fairly inferred from this fact, that he did not show himself to chosen witnesses, and satisfy them, by many *infallible* proofs, of his being indeed alive from the dead? Miracles, say they again, are not wrought in our day: but, is it a legitimate conclusion from this fact, that miracles were never wrought;—that the heavenly commission of Christ and his apostles,

was not attested “by signs and wonders, and by divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost?” The sacred scriptures are not accompanied with evidence so irresistible, as to overpower all unbelief, and compel the assent of all men to their divine original: but, does it follow from this fact, that they are not attended by evidence sufficient to convince every candid and inquiring mind, and to leave every unbeliever without excuse?

On every subject in religion, the question should be, not what evidence is not given, but what evidence is given, and whether it be satisfactory. Taking this rule for our guide, it appears highly improper, first, to determine in our mind that the right of infants to baptism ought to be supported by such and such evidence; and, then, to conclude that they have not a right to it, merely because the particular kind and degree of evidence which we fancy, is not found in sacred scripture. Our duty is, to receive the truth in whatever way it may please God to make it known: and, in regard to the question under consideration, it is our manifest duty to collect all the evidence contained in the great rule of our faith and practice; and, if it be sufficient to determine the question in favour of children, to acknowledge their right; although unsupported by evidence as strong as we could wish, or of that kind which we should prefer: ever remembering, that it would be presumptuous, in a high degree, to prescribe to the Sovereign of the universe, whose infinite wisdom

has adjusted the various parts of his revelation, as well as other things, so as most effectually to subserve the accomplishment of his own adorable purposes.

On this correct and reasonable principle, we have conducted our inquiry in regard to the privileges of children. Instead of determining what the holy scriptures *ought* to say, we have diligently endeavoured to learn what they *do* say, on this interesting question. Far from prescribing to our august Sovereign how to make known his will, we have searched after the intimations of it with respect to our beloved offspring. And what has been the result of patient and humble investigation? We have discovered, that, in the time of Abraham, the Supreme Being gave to his people's children a sealed interest in his covenant, which, beyond all dispute, they continued to enjoy till our Saviour's advent; that this *perpetual* covenant secures to children a special relation to the Most High, constituting them members of his church, under the Christian, as it did under the Jewish dispensation; and that baptism is *now*, what circumcision was *formerly*, a SEAL to this covenant. These important particulars are revealed with sufficient plainness: and, in favour of them, we have seen our Lord, his prophets and apostles, and the providence and Spirit of God, all unite in bearing testimony. On these truths we have founded the conclusion, that children have a DIVINE RIGHT to baptism, the seal of the covenant, and the token of church-fellowship.

While, therefore, we admit the New Testament to contain neither positive precept, nor express example in favour of our practice, we maintain confidently, that our Sovereign Lord has signified his will with sufficient plainness, to make it our duty both to acknowledge the membership of infants in his church, and to mark them with the seal of his covenant, by washing them with baptismal water.

In replying to the second objection, it was shown that the New Testament is not silent on this subject. We now intend to evince, that, although it does not state, in direct terms, the baptism of infants by the founders of the Christian church, yet it does use such language as makes it highly probable they did baptize them.

The sacred historian informs us, that Lydia and her *household* were baptized;—that the jailor was baptized and *all his* straightway; and Paul tells us, he baptized the *household* of Stephanas.* Is this the language of antipædobaptism? Were one opposed to the administration of this rite to infants to baptize a whole family, would he not, in writing an account of it, use language different from that of the inspired penman, and speak of the recipients of the ordinance, not as a *household*, but as *individuals*? Surely the sacred phraseology accords best with the sentiment and practice of pædobaptism.

On this presumptive argument, I shall not dwell. Nor will I detain you by reasoning on Acts ii. 38, 39,

* Acts xvi. 15, 33. 1 Cor. i. 16.

or on Mat. xxviii. 19. From both these passages, considerable evidence might be drawn. But I purposely pass them by, in order to lay before you a text containing evidence of a more decisive character. You will find it in 1 Cor. vii. 14. The text reads thus: *For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children UNCLEAN; but now are they HOLY.*

To set aside the evidence arising from this passage in favour of infant-baptism, it is contended, that the apostle is here treating of the legitimacy of a believer's marriage with an unbeliever, and the consequent legitimacy of their children, in reference to the *civil law*.* This construction is wholly inadmissible, and highly absurd on various accounts.

1. It is not conceivable how persons, having been lawfully married previously to their conversion to Christianity, should, in consequence of that event, be led to doubt the legitimacy of their marriage.

2. If, in some unaccountable way, such doubts arose in the mind of any believer at Corinth, why did he apply to the apostle to remove them? Paul was a preacher of the gospel, not an interpreter of the civil law. The proper source of information was the civil law itself: and the doubting Christian, if unable to interpret it for himself, should have taken counsel of some authorized legal character.

* Booth.

Admitting that such difficulties actually sprung up in the minds of some members of the Corinthian church, and that they were absurd enough, instead of applying to the proper sources of information at home, to write on the subject to the apostle at a distance from them; let us examine how logical this interpretation will make his reasoning. The believer says to him, I have doubts about the validity of my marriage; I wish you to satisfy my mind on this important and delicate subject, and counsel me what ought to be done by a person in my circumstances. What is the apostle's reply? "You and your unbelieving partner have been lawfully married." And how does he prove this assertion? You will observe, that the *latter* part of the text is offered by the inspired writer as a proof of the *former*. In confirmation of this assertion, does he appeal to the civil law, and show from it that the marriage of these Christians was legally contracted and celebrated? No; he barely makes another assertion, that their children were legitimate, and that too *in terms never found* in the civil law among the heathen: "Else were your children *unclean*; but now are they *holy*." A strange proof! If a man doubt the legitimacy of his marriage, he must necessarily doubt the legitimacy of his children: and, therefore, when he asks for evidence to remove his difficulties, to tell him his children are legitimate, and, consequently, his marriage, would be trifling with a tender inquiring conscience. The only way to remove such doubts

in the minds of the Corinthians, would have been to convince them, that their marriages had been contracted agreeably to the prescriptions of the civil law. Satisfied as to their marriage, their doubts with respect to their children, would of course have vanished.

4. This construction gives to the terms *sanctify*, and *holy*, a sense in which they are never used in scripture. Legitimacy in regard to a *divine* law, they may and do express; but they never bear this signification in reference to *human* law.*

* Mr. Booth, at the close of his laboured interpretation of this text, artfully endeavours to make his readers believe, that the difficulty arising from the sense which he gives to the term *sanctified*, is the very difficulty which those who reject this sense have to remove. His words are as follow: "For where, I demand, where is it (the term *sanctified*) employed in the *whole sacred code*, to express that *act, or engagement*, between a man and a woman, which renders it lawful for them to cohabit as husband and wife? *This, however, is manifestly the case here.*"† Truly, this is a strange demand. Mr. B. attaches a most extraordinary idea to the term; such an idea as it never expresses in the Bible: and, then, feeling embarrassed, and unable to justify his interpretation, by a similar use of the term in the sacred writings, he boldly demands help from his opponents, insinuating it to be incumbent on them, who reject this signification as unscriptural, to remove the difficulty attending it. For he adds immediately after the above quotation: "When, therefore, our brethren produce a parallel text, respecting the term *sanctified*, we will engage to return the favour, with regard to the word *holy.*" Here, it is manifest, Mr. Booth concedes that he applies to the terms *sanctified* and *holy*, a sense in which they are not used in any other passage of sacred scripture. But he makes a most

† Booth on Baptism, vol. ii. p. 410.

Having thus exposed the inconsistency of the above mentioned interpretation, I proceed to lay before you what is conceived to be the true meaning of this important text. To render the explanation the plainer, it shall be given in the following steps.

1. From the context, it is evident, that the question proposed to the apostle,* and answered by him, related, not to the children of the Corinthians, but to the lawfulness of cohabiting with unbelieving partners: for the text assigns the reason, why a Christian man should not put away his unbelieving wife, and why a converted woman should not leave her unbelieving husband.

2. It is also manifest, that the apostle removes the difficulty in the minds of the Corinthians, or proves the lawfulness of living in a marriage-connexion with unbelieving partners, by referring them to the state or holiness of their children: and, if we respect Paul as a correct reasoner, we shall believe the Corinthians were acquainted with the fact which he adduced in proof of his doctrine. Had they been ignorant of this fact, although it amounted to demonstration in his mind, it could not have been any evidence to them.

equitable demand! He insists that his opponents shall help him out of his first difficulty; and then he promises to return the kindness, *by helping HIMSELF* out of the second! But, alas! having fallen into the pit which he dug for himself, it is hardly probable they will have charity enough to assist him, especially as he seems to consider his own case as *hopeless*.

* 1 Cor. vii. 1.

3. The cause of the difficulty was a Jewish law relative to marriage. The doubts, which the Corinthians entertained about the lawfulness of living in a marriage-state with unbelievers, unquestionably sprung from some law which they were apprehensive forbade such a connexion: for, if they knew of no law of this character, it was impossible for any suspicions on the subject ever to arise in their minds. What law could this have been? Not the moral law; for it contained no such prohibition. Not the civil law; for it authorized persons, in these circumstances, living together. From what law, then, could the difficulty have sprung? The Jewish law, which forbade the people of God to contract marriage with heathens.* By this law, the offspring of marriages violating it, were rendered *unclean* or *unholy*, and excluded from religious privileges to which other children were admitted. The breach of this law was considered as a high offence; which could not be expiated but by dissolving the marriage-relation, and putting away both the strange wives, and their *children*.†

Now, it is well known, that many Judaizing teachers disturbed the peace of the primitive churches, by inculcating the necessity of obedience to the law of Moses. It is also a notorious fact, that, although a council of apostles, convened at Jerusalem, for the express purpose, gave, on this question, a solemn judgment, which exonerated Gentile-Christians from the burdens imposed by the Jewish law-

* Deut. vii. 3, 4.

† Ezra, chap. ix and x.

giver; yet these corrupt teachers ceased not to perplex the churches, and to endeavour to bring them into bondage. Such men, it is obvious, could not overlook so important a precept of Moses, as that prohibiting certain marriages: and, it is highly probable, they inculcated it as a duty resulting from it, for Christians to put away their unbelieving wives, and to leave their unbelieving husbands. Here, then, we see the true cause of the difficulty removed by the apostle in the text;—the real source of those doubts, on a most delicate subject, which afflicted the Corinthian converts.

4. St. Paul answers the question, probably proposed to him on this interesting case of conscience,* by showing, that the Jewish law relative to marriage, whence the perplexity had arisen, was not obligatory on Christians. This is not done, it is true, by asserting in so many words, 'The law is repealed; but it is taught in language easily understood by those who keep in view the cause of the difficulty. This law pronounced the heathen *unclean, unholy*. It forbade Jews to marry them; and, if violated by any, it required the transgressors to dissolve their marriages, and separate from their husbands or wives. Had this law, as certain teachers affirmed, been binding on Christians, it would have required from them the same painful separations. But it was not obligatory: and the apostle declares the truth, in language consonant

to scripture-phraseology: “The unbelieving husband, is *sanctified* by the wife and the unbelieving wife is *sanctified* by the husband.” Is not this intelligible language? The law pronounced persons, in the circumstances contemplated, *unclean, unholy*: and is not an apostolic affirmation that they are now *sanctified*, the same, in amount, as saying, The law is no longer obligatory?

In like manner, was the repeal of the law distinguishing meats into clean and unclean, and restricting the intercourse of Jews with Gentiles, made known. By a vision, in which Peter was directed to kill and eat unclean animals, and by this reply to his objection, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common;” was meat, formerly prohibited, *sanctified by the word of God*, and free intercourse with Gentiles, opened.*

Here, then, the apostle might have rested the matter. But he chose to support his affirmation, by referring them, as decisive proof, to a fact with which they were acquainted,—the holiness of a believer’s children: “Else,” says he, “were your children *unclean*; but now are they *holy*.” You inquire, “Whether it be the duty of Christians to separate from their unbelieving partners. I answer, *No*: and to satisfy your minds, I refer you to the condition of children born of parents in such circumstances. They are *holy*; and acknowledged by the church to be so; for they are baptized. Now,

* Acts x. 9—20, 28.

this fact, duly reflected on, will convince you, that the law which has occasioned your perplexity, is not binding on Christians: for, if it were, such children, as *formerly*, would *now* be UNCLEAN, and treated accordingly by the church:—they would be denied the privilege of baptism. It is, therefore, lawful for a Christian man or woman to cohabit with an unbelieving wife or husband.

That this is the inspired writer's meaning, is apparent from this consideration, that the Corinthians could not understand his terms in any other sense. As stated already, it must, in deference to the apostle's skill in argument, be admitted, they knew the fact to which he refers as decisive proof of his affirmation; namely, that the children of the marriages contemplated, were not unclean, but holy. The question, then, is, What ideas did the Corinthians attach to these terms? Did they understand Paul as telling them, that their children were legitimate, and not *bastards*? This cannot be admitted for reasons already assigned; and for this additional one, that if he had urged such a fact, it could not have removed a difficulty springing, not from a human, but from a *divine* law. Did they understand him as meaning the internal holiness of Christian children? By no means: for he never taught such a doctrine, but, on the contrary, declared all, by nature, *“dead in trespasses and sins, and children of wrath.”**

* Ephes. ii. 1—3.

How, then, did the Corinthians understand the apostle? Just as a Jew, married to a heathen, and afterwards converted to Christianity, would have understood his language. Had Paul said to such a convert, Your children are not unclean; they are holy: he would have concluded the apostle designed to teach him, that the law, prohibiting the connexion which he had formed, was repealed, and, consequently, that his children were admissible to church-privileges. And this signification the Corinthians were necessarily led to adopt; because the terms *unclean* and *holy*, stood in such close connexion with that Jewish law which, had it been obligatory on them, would have rendered their children unclean, shut them out of the church, and denied them baptism.

Thus, the apostle was understood: and the Corinthians saw his doctrine carried into practice, and the churches acting on the principle of children being *federally holy*, by dedicating them to God in the ordinance of baptism, the seal of his covenant. This interpretation gives to the apostle's argument propriety, consistency, and strength.

As an objection to this construction of the text, it may be asked, "If the federal holiness, or baptism of children, was a fact known to the Corinthians, how came they to doubt of the lawfulness of a Christian's remaining in a marriage-connexion with an unbeliever? From this fact, could they not have inferred the repeal of the prohibitory Jewish sta-

tute?" We have already stated how their perplexity arose:—it was occasioned by the influence of corrupt teachers, insisting on obedience to the laws of Moses, and to this one in particular. And none need be surprised at their success, in filling with doubts on a point, though important, yet not essential, minds but imperfectly instructed and grounded in the truths of our holy religion; who recollect, that teachers of the same stamp, had influence enough to shake the faith of the church of Galatia in fundamental doctrines of the gospel, so as to excite in St. Paul fears of having laboured among them in vain.*

Another objection against this interpretation, is, "That the federal holiness of children goes to revive the abrogated covenant of Sinai." The objection is founded on a capital mistake,—that all relative holiness depended on the existence of *that* covenant. This kind of holiness existed long before the memorable transactions which took place at the foot of the sacred mount; as must appear to any one who reflects on the nature of it. For what does it mean? Simply, that the person, denominated holy in this sense of the term, stands in a *special relation* to God, and is dedicated to his service. Now, did not the covenant made with Abraham, bring him and his seed into a special relation to Jehovah? Were they not *visibly* set apart and consecrated to his service? Unquestionably. They were, then, re-

* Gal. iii. 1—4.

lately holy: and, consequently, external holiness existed ages before the formation of the Sinai-covenant; and Abraham's covenant, being perpetual with the church, must, of course, make all who have an interest in it federally or relatively holy. In fact, as long as a profession of religion shall be made, and men sustain a visible, covenant-relation to God, this kind of holiness will necessarily exist. Zeal for a favourite tenet may aim at abolishing the name; but the thing itself cannot be destroyed: and even persons who disdain to be thus denominated, are externally holy to the Lord, as certainly as they have been baptized in his name, and profess to have entered into covenant with him. They are visibly set apart to the service and honour of Jehovah: and, consequently, whether renewed in heart or not, are, in fact, specially related to him; that is, they are *relatively holy*. Whoever, then, would prove the abolition of federal holiness, must undertake to prove, that, under the Christian dispensation, there is no external administration of the covenant;—that no profession of religion is required;—and that men no longer consecrate themselves *visibly* to God. In a word, while Abraham's covenant exists, this kind of holiness must exist; and, while infants retain an interest in it, *they* must be federally holy.*

One more objection to our interpretation of the disputed text, it seems necessary to notice. It is, “That this construction applies to the terms *sanc-*

* See Letter III. p. 46—49.

tified and *holy* different significations; whereas, it is observed, they both must denote the same thing.”

You will remark, my brethren, that the latter word is an adjective, expressing quality; and the former, a verb, signifying action: and, therefore, that this real difference in the terms themselves, would authorize, if required, the application of different senses to them. Indeed, although both were the same word, yet it would not be indispensable to affix to them precisely the same idea: for there are texts in holy scripture, in which it is absolutely necessary to give to the same term, occurring twice in the same verse, two different meanings. Take the two following as examples: “For their sakes, I *sanctify myself*, that they also might be *sanctified through the truth*. And Moses said unto the people, *Fear* not: for God is come to prove you, and that his *fear* may be before your faces, that ye sin not.”*

Although, therefore, our interpretation applied to the terms *sanctified* and *holy* senses very different, yet, if they were warranted by scripture-authority, and comported with the apostle’s argument, it could be no reasonable objection. But this is not fact. We give to both words the same general idea; namely, *freedom from that kind of uncleanness*, which the prohibitory precept attached to adults and children in the circumstances contemplated.

By no means, however, will it follow, that unbelievers connected by marriage with believers,

* John xvii. 19. Exod. xx. 20.

ought to be baptized, as well as their children. For the holiness, communicated to the former by the abolition of this law, although the same in the general idea, yet differs in *degree* from the holiness communicated to the latter: the sanctification of adults being such as to authorize believers continuing to perform towards them matrimonial duties; but the sanctification of children reaching so far as to render them fit subjects for baptism. In a word, the effect resulting from the repeal of this law, is the same as would have taken place under the Jewish economy, had it been then annulled. What effect would in that case have followed? Would the church have been authorized to circumcise Pagan adults remaining attached to idolatry? Certainly not: for other reasons than sprung from this law, would have prohibited the application of the covenant-token to such characters. Their children, however, would have acquired a title to circumcision, and been put in the same condition as to church-privileges, which such children enjoyed previously to the enacting of the prohibitory statute. It is, then, unreasonable to object against our construction of the passage, that it warrants the baptism of unbelieving adults; because the repeal of this law, even under the Mosaic economy, would not have communicated to them such a degree of holiness as to authorize their circumcision.

On the whole, this text contains a clear apostolic testimony in favour of the federal holiness of

infants born of believing parents, and their consequent right to baptism; and an inspired record of the facts, that they were viewed in this light by apostolic churches, and freely admitted to the Christian seal of Abraham's covenant.

5. Another objection urged against the admission of infants to baptism, and the last which I shall notice, is, "That, being unconscious of what is done, and not giving their consent, no obligation can result from applying the ordinance to them; and, consequently, it is a useless ceremony.

Had the advocates of this objection lived under the Jewish dispensation, they might, with equal propriety, have opposed the *circumcision* of infants as a useless ceremony. Infants of eight days old were *then* as ignorant of the meaning of the sign applied to them, as children are *now*: and, if no obligation result from their baptism, none could have resulted from their circumcision; because they neither gave, nor were asked their consent.

This objection is founded on a principle the most absurd; a principle which, admitted as just, would exonerate us from obligations the most tender, indisputable, and solemn. Birth was given us in our native land, without our consent, or putting it at our option in what country to be born: therefore, the civil compact has no authority over us, until we give our consent to live under it! We were connected with parents whom we did not choose; they brought us into the world, without consulting

our wishes; they nourished and educated us, without deigning to solicit our consent: it follows, from these facts, that we owe to them no gratitude, no obedience; we may, at our pleasure, dissolve the connexion, and refuse to be their children! The great progenitor of the human race was constituted our federal head, previously to our existence, and, of course, without our consent: therefore, it was unjust to bring upon us, his unoffending offspring, the consequences of his fatal apostasy, in which, every day presents painful evidences that we are involved! Indeed, the principle, carried to its full extent, will go to prove, that we owe no gratitude, no obedience to our glorious Creator; because he gave us existence, without asking us whether we were willing to be created!

How absurd the principle, from which consequences so shocking to common sense, may be fairly deduced! The fact is, an obligation of a most serious and solemn nature, does result from infant baptism. A child is bound by every lawful act of his parents, which involves his interest. Both by human and by divine law, they are constituted his natural guardians: and, therefore, if they enter into any compact in his behalf, not exceeding their just authority, he is as much bound by it, as though he had entered into it by his own *voluntary* choice. Can it, then, be doubted whether children are laid under solemn obligations of duty, by that dedication of them to God, which their parents make in baptism? Is not this a lawful act; an act required by

divine authority? Is it not also an act, not of severity, but of love; an act, securing to children relations to Jehovah and to his people, of an invaluable nature? The Creator, having an unlimited propriety in all his creatures, possesses an indubitable right to command parents to dedicate the children which he gives them to his service and glory, and to accompany the surrender with a significant ceremony: and, the command being issued, parents are bound, indispensably bound to obey. Is it not highly absurd, then, to imagine, that an act required by the Creator, and done in obedience to his will by our natural guardians, imposes on us no obligation; merely because it was performed without our consent? Many, no doubt, baptized in infancy, when arrived at mature age, feel no sense of obligation arising from baptismal engagements: but this mournful fact proves, not the nullity of them, but only depravity of heart, and stupidity of conscience, or, at best, mistaken views of duty. Samuel was, before his birth, dedicated to the Lord, by his mother; but, not having imbibed the spirit of this objection, he felt himself bound by her vow to wait upon the Almighty in the service of his house. Had *he* been disposed to indulge a disobedient temper, he might have pleaded, not only that the vow had been made without his *consent*, but also that it was a *voluntary one*, not expressly required by the law of God. But happily the inclination of this pious child coincided with duty; and he diligently and faithfully served the Lord all the days of his life, agreeably to his

mother's consecrating promise. And had all baptized youth as correct views, and as holy dispositions, as young Samuel, they would, not only feel the obligations arising from their infant baptism, but bless the Lord, that they have been dedicated to his service in that sacred ordinance, and impressed with the seal of his gracious covenant.

The right of infants to baptism has now, it is presumed, been fairly and solidly established on scriptural grounds; and the principal objections urged against it have been refuted. Other passages of sacred scripture, purposely omitted for the sake of brevity, might have been explained and brought in support of this important truth, and the accumulation of evidence made greater. Testimonies too in favour of infant baptism, might be adduced from the writings of THE FATHERS of the Christian church. But, as an examination of them would extend these letters, already reaching beyond the limits originally contemplated, I shall omit them. This may be done with great safety to our cause: and, indeed, it is unnecessary to call in the aid of human authority for the support of a truth, which is so *clearly* and *amply* taught, in the divine records of our faith and practice.

Here, therefore, I close my discussion of the right of infants to baptism. In my next, I shall, my brethren, solicit your attention to an examination of that question which regards the mode of administering this Christian ordinance.

LETTER XII.

MODE OF BAPTISM.—*Immersion not exclusive—Presumptions against such claims.*

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN,

WHEN I commenced the exposition of the Abrahamic covenant, in order to establish, on this ancient and permanent basis, the divine right of infant baptism, it was not my intention to discuss the question relative to the mode of administering that ordinance. But afterwards reflecting how frequently and openly the mode adopted by our church has been censured and condemned, it occurred that silence, on this subject in these letters, might be construed into a supposition, that we believe our practice to be incapable of being justified on scriptural principles. Influenced by this consideration, I determined to enter on our defence in regard to the mode of baptism.

To Christian baptism, three things are necessary; namely, a suitable subject,—the application of water,—and the use of that sacred form of words prescribed by our blessed Lord. If, by an authorized administrator, water be applied to a rational creature, in the name of the Father, and of the

Son, and of the Holy Ghost; that person is truly baptized, whether water be applied by effusion, by washing, by sprinkling, or by immersion. The particular manner of using the significant emblem, is not essential: it is only a circumstance of the ordinance, which may be varied without effecting its validity. For wise reasons, our divine Redeemer has restricted his church to no single mode, but left her at liberty to adopt that which circumstances may at any time render expedient and edifying.

This is our sentiment. But it is condemned as unscriptural; and the practice which we ground upon it, reproached as being inconsistent with plain apostolic example, and a violation of a positive precept of our Sovereign Lord. Were our brethren, who thus treat our sentiment and practice, merely to give a preference to that mode which they use in baptism, it would be unnecessary to say any thing in our defence. Both parties might then salute each other as baptized members of the Redeemer's church: and the difference between them would be so inconsiderable, as to furnish no excuse for angry disputes. But this unhappily is not the case. Our opponents not only give a preference to immersion, but affirm it to be the only lawful mode of administering baptism; and that the use of any other destroys the ordinance, as well as departs from recorded precedents established by inspired men, and contravenes the will of our Lord plainly revealed in his word. They maintain that we are un-

baptized Christians, and, consequently, not members of the church of Jesus Christ. All this is openly affirmed, and frequently inculcated. Thus we are put upon our defence. This I now undertake: and hope to be able to prove our opinion correct, and our practice consonant both to apostolic practice, and to the will of the Lord our Redeemer. In vindicating the mode which we have adopted, I have no wish to condemn that of our brethren. They use the appointed, significant emblem, as well as we: and, therefore, as water is applied to the recipient of the ordinance, the essence of it is preserved. But the justification of our own practice, and the proving of our baptism to be really scriptural, will, by necessary consequence, evince, that they have no warrant for the censures which they so freely pass upon us. To the law and to the testimony, we make our appeal.

Previously, however, to an examination of the divine precept relative to Christian baptism, and of the practice of the apostles under it, I beg leave to detain you, by laying before you some presumptive arguments in our favour. The consequences which result from the exclusive claims of our opponents to this divine ordinance, are so serious in their nature, as to furnish several presumptions against these claims; which, when viewed collectively, amount to decisive proof that they cannot be well founded.

1. The first consequence resulting from their sentiment, is, that it *reduces vast numbers of pro-*

fessing Christians to the state of UNBAPTIZED PERSONS. It is well known, that, while only one denomination of Christians* baptize by immersion, all other denominations in this country use a different mode: and it is also notorious, that the latter are incomparably more numerous than the former. From this fact, which cannot be denied, a fair presumption may be drawn, that the great mass of Christians cannot have misunderstood their Lord's instructions with respect to a positive rite, so greatly as to have deprived themselves of the enjoyment of it. Far be it from me to lay it down as a maxim, that the truth is always to be found with the majority. Often it happens that the majority do not examine the subject about which a difference in opinion prevails, and suffer themselves to be misguided by favourite leaders: thus they run into error, while the minority, by careful investigation, discern and embrace the truth. But, in the present case, when we consider the nature of the question, and the characters found among those who hold other modes than immersion to be valid; we may fairly presume, the majority of Christians cannot be in an error so essential as this objection imports. The design of our Lord in appointing this sacred rite, was, that it should be worn, by his disciples, as a distinctive

* The *Dunkers* use immersion. But they are a sect so small, and so little known, that it seemed unnecessary to take notice of them above. Besides, they are entitled to the *name* derived from baptism equally with those who have assumed it; and may, therefore, be, with propriety, ranked under the same general name.

mark;—that it should be a solemn introduction of them into his visible church;—and that it should be enjoyed as an important privilege, signifying and sealing to them the blessings of his gracious covenant. Can it, then, be admitted, that all other denominations of professing Christians, except one, have so grossly misconstrued the rule of their faith and practice, as to have deprived themselves of this important privilege? lost the substance, while they retain the shadow? imagining themselves impressed with the seal of their Great Master, while they have only a counterfeit impression of it? If this be fact, how has it happened? What untoward cause has produced this mournful deception; thus defrauding them of an important privilege, and seducing them from the path of duty? *Want of learning?* None dare assert this to be the cause. The highest honours which genius and learning could merit, have been due to those who combated the exclusive claims of immersion. They have flourished at the head of colleges and universities; they have filled the theological chair with the greatest applause; they have walked through the circle of the sciences; they have enlightened the world by their genius, and instructed it by their incomparable writings; they have adorned the pulpit by their eloquence and learning; their praise has been in all the churches. *Want of piety?* We number in our ranks the brightest luminaries of the church; men who have made the greatest sacrifices in favour of true

religion; men of apostolic spirit and zeal; men “of whom the world was not worthy;” spirits that rank high among their kindred spirits in glory, and are distinguished by the brilliant crown of martyrdom. *Want of candid investigation?* Who can bring this opprobrious accusation against such holy men, the first wish of whose heart, was to know and do their Master’s will; who, by their writings on the subject, prove that they had maturely examined it. Thus possessing every requisite quality for searching after and finding the truth, who can believe that these Christians were, with respect to an important rite, in an error so essential as to have lived and died without it? Had their characters been different; had they been destitute of learning and piety, or had they neglected to investigate their duty; sufficient reasons might be assigned for this great mistake. But when we consider the excellence of their characters; that they were eminent for learning and genius; that they loved the truth, and searched for it as for hidden treasure; that they were models of piety: it appears incredible, that they should have lived and died without the seal of that covenant, which was all their salvation, and all their desire! Was Luther, that great reformer; was Calvin, that incomparable genius; was Knox, that intrepid servant of Christ; was Owen, that learned and profound divine; was Baxter, so fervent in piety, and acute in his investigations; and were thousands of other divines, eminent for their

piety and learning, and belonging to the reformed churches, both in Europe and in America: were all these, together with the myriads of Christians whom they instructed and edified by their discourses, writings, and examples, so mistaken in their views of duty, that they lived and died without baptism; without a regular introduction into the visible church of Christ; without that mark appointed by our Lord to distinguish his disciples from the world; without the enjoyment of a privilege designed by him for the benefit of all his followers? **INCREDIBLE!**

2. The next presumption against immersion, as an exclusive mode, is, *That it reflects on the wisdom and goodness of our heavenly Lawgiver.* I am fully aware, that, when speaking about a line of conduct becoming divine perfections, we may, unless the bold decisions of human reason be duly and cautiously restrained, be guilty of unpardonable irreverence and arrogance. Yet there are cases so plain, that we may confidently assert, such procedure would not comport with the character of an infinitely perfect being. For example: The state of this world is so disordered, and the distribution of rewards and punishments, so unequal, that it is no presumption, but due respect to the attributes of our Supreme Ruler, to affirm that this confused state of things cannot always remain, and that the glory of his holy name requires his interposition to correct the prevailing disorder, by rewarding every man according to his works.

Of this kind is the case before us. Two points we may take for granted: first, that our Lord instituted baptism for all his disciples, to be worn by them as a mark of distinction, from the rest of mankind; and, secondly, that he foresaw the disputes which have arisen on this subject, and the different modes of administering the ordinance which have prevailed in his church. Neither of these positions can be disputed by any reflecting on the omniscience of our Redeemer; and on the commission given to his apostles to baptize all nations.

Now, from these premises, the conclusion is obvious and incontestible, that, if Jesus Christ had appointed immersion as the only lawful mode of baptism, he would have delivered his instructions on the nature of this positive rite, so plainly as to have enabled his disciples, desiring to know and do his will, to acquire the knowledge of the true mode of applying baptismal water; so plainly as to have preserved from running into an error destructive of his ordinance, the millions of his disciples, who, on this supposition, have adopted so great an error, and continued in it through successive ages, and in the most flourishing periods of his church. If immersion be essential to baptism, and every other mode incompatible with its very nature, then the mass of christians have, many centuries, been destitute of an ordinance, which our blessed Lord designed for all, and as a source of instruction and comfort to them. How can such a fact be reconci-

led with his infinite wisdom and goodness? He foreknew the consequences, which have actually resulted from his instructions on this point of duty: and, surely, it appears a fair conclusion,—a conclusion which his honor demands from us, that if he had intended to make immersion essential to baptism, he would have delivered his instructions so plainly as to have kept, at least, sincere and inquiring Christians, from an error so radical, as the objection imputes to those who do not use this mode of baptism.

But, it is asserted, our Lord has, by positive precept, and by apostolic practice, plainly determined immersion to be the only lawful mode. The examination of this assertion, I reserve for another place in these letters, where it will be shown to be groundless. Here, to destroy its force as an objection to the presumption illustrated, it is sufficient to state the fact, that the great body of Christians have interpreted both the precept of our Lord, and the practice of his apostles, otherwise than those who urge the objection. It cannot then be made appear, that Jesus Christ has revealed his will concerning immersion so plainly as to do away the force of my remarks, unless one of these two points can be proved; namely, either that he has, in regard to baptism, legislated only for a part of his church, or that Christians not using immersion, act against their own convictions of truth and duty. If our Lord legislated only for a part of his church, for

that section which practises immersion, then it must be allowed, they being judges, that his instructions with regard to the mode of baptism, are plain and decisive. But if this idea cannot be admitted; if he legislated for his whole church; then, allowing other denominations the moderate praise of being sincere in their inquiries after truth, and acting honestly up to their conviction of duty, and taking their capacity as the criterion of plainness, it will follow, the instructions of our Lord are not plainly in favour of immersion. The *fact*, that they believe he has not determined immersion to be the only way of administering baptism, incontrovertibly decides the question.

That their capacity is, in this case, the true criterion by which we are to judge, is obvious. Were I teaching a number of children, and found that only a few understood my instructions, how ought the question, whether I were sufficiently plain in communicating my ideas, to be determined? By an appeal to the capacity of the few who did, or to that of the majority who did not, understand my meaning? Certainly to the latter. So, in determining the question, whether our Lord have plainly taught immersion to be the only lawful mode of baptism, we must appeal, not to the apprehensions of one denomination of Christians who think he has, but to the apprehensions of the many denominations who think he has not.

The instructions of our Lord, it appears, are not *plainly and decisively* in favor of immersion as the *only* mode of baptism. From this fact, we may conclude, that it is not the *only lawful* mode; because his wisdom and his love to the church would have disposed him, had he intended immersion to be essential to the valid administration of this ordinance, to deliver his mind in such a way, as would have preserved so many millions of his followers from adopting and continuing in a practice utterly repugnant to his revealed will, and fixing on the larger part of his people the *reproach* of being UNBAPTIZED.

3. A third presumption against immersion as an exclusive mode, is, *That it pays no regard to climate, circumstances, and the mild genius of Christianity.* The Jewish economy was suited to the church of God, while confined to one country, and to one nation; but the Christian dispensation is suited to her state in that period in which she is not thus confined, but is to spread herself over the whole globe, and diffuse herself among all nations. The rigorous bondage of Moses has given place to the mild reign of Jesus Christ. The church serves no longer in the spirit of a *servant*, but in the spirit of a *son*. Formerly, she resembled an heir “under tutors and governors, until the time appointed of the father;” now, she resembles the heir arrived at mature age, and put in possession of his

inheritance. This characteristic difference between the two economies, is discernible in their doctrines, precepts, promises, and ordinances.

Had immersion been prescribed as the only valid mode of baptism, it would have been a departure from the genius of the present dispensation. Such a mode may be practised in a warm climate without inconvenience; but it is not adapted to the severe and icy winters of a northern region. Excessive attachment to immersion has impelled some, to the vain attempt of proving it is not prejudicial to health, even in cold climates. In support of this opinion, they have adduced the authority of physicians recommending the frequent use of the cold bath. Now, admitting, in deference to the judgment of professional characters, that, by daily use, persons become accustomed to the cold bath, and gain greater vigour of constitution; yet, before the position, in proof of which this medical opinion is pleaded, can derive any aid from it, it should be shown to be a fact, that the people of this country are in the habit of immersing themselves daily in cold water. But, while this is not their habitual practice, it might, with equal truth, be maintained, that a person long confined to his chamber by sickness, could, without danger, go abroad in rainy weather, because others, hardened by frequent exposure, experience no inconvenience; as be contended, that a single application of cold water is never likely to be hurtful to any, although wholly unaccustomed to it. Can weak, infirm people, unable to

bear a few drops of rain, endure the plunging of their whole body into a river during the winter-season, without receiving an injury to their health? To affirm this, serves only to prove how far zeal for a favourite tenet, can impel even men of sense and learning. There are diseases, it is well known, the subjects of which could not be thus immersed without manifest danger to their lives: and, therefore, if immersion be the only lawful mode of baptism, they must run this great risk, or die unbaptized. And can we imagine, that our gracious Lord, who has suited his dispensation to every climate, and condescends to bear the infirmities of his people, has prescribed a mode of administering his ordinance, attended often with danger to the health, and sometimes even to the lives of his disciples? The cross must indeed be borne, whenever our master is pleased to lay it on our shoulders: but, let it never be forgotten, the crosses, which fidelity to his cause requires us to bear, are such as he prepares and appoints, not those which a rash and impetuous zeal occasions. On the one hand, we must not allow ourselves in any thing prohibited by our Lord, however pleasing to our natural inclinations; and, on the other, we should not surrender the liberty which he has granted, but thankfully enjoy it.

The ideas of delicacy which prevail in this country, receive a shock, when females are seen plunged into a river, before a promiscuous concourse of people. But, not to insist upon this, we may assert,

without fear of contradiction, that the mode of baptism in use among us, is abundantly more favourable than immersion to the preservation of that devout and holy frame of soul, and the exercise of those spiritual and believing meditations, which so well accord with the nature of that solemn transaction in which the recipient of the ordinance is engaged. On the bank of a river, how many things concur to distract the thoughts! The croud, the adjustment of clothes, the dread of cold water, shivering limbs, and a subsequent change of dress; all, and many other incidents, unite to disturb the composure, particularly of female minds, and divert them from spiritual and eternal objects. But, in the house of God, the solemnities of public worship, the devout attention of spectators, and the previous retirement of the candidate, are all calculated to assist the soul in making that solemn surrender to God, and keeping up those holy exercises of heart and mind, which the ordinance demands.

Such strong presumptive arguments oppose the exclusive claims of immersion. Bring them, my brethren, into one view, and unite their force. These claims reduce vast numbers of professing Christians to the reproachful state of *unbaptized* persons:—they pay no regard to climate, circumstances, and the mild genius of Christianity;—and they reflect upon the wisdom and goodness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, I ask, whether a sentiment, from which such serious consequences result,

can be founded in truth; and whether these presumptions, collectively considered, do not amount to conclusive evidence, that immersion cannot be prescribed in holy scripture, as the only *lawful* mode of administering baptism?

LETTER XIII.

The question in dispute fairly stated—John's baptism not Christian—Cases of apostolic baptism examined.

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN,

THE consequences resulting from immersion, considered as an exclusive mode of baptism, have furnished us with strong presumptive arguments against the pretensions of its advocates. But they profess to establish their claims on firm ground. They plead apostolic example, and positive precept. This is high and commanding authority; and, if it warrant their exclusive claims, we must submit, and allow them to be well supported. I propose in this and the next succeeding letters, to examine the principal argument of our opponents, and to show

you the grounds on which they venture to call all who use a mode different from theirs *unbaptized Christians*.

1. They adduce apostolic practice, as authorizing no other way of applying baptismal water than immersion. We unite with them in professing to entertain great reverence for those honoured founders of the Christian church, who were led by the Holy Spirit of God; and in maintaining, that their practice in the administration of religious ordinances, should be duly imitated.

Let us hear, then, what our opponents have to say in regard to apostolic example. They bid us open the New Testament, and look at certain cases of baptism, recorded by the pen of inspiration; which they affirm proves clearly that the apostles baptized by immersion.

Before entering on the examination of these cases, I shall make one remark, which I wish you to recollect throughout the whole discussion. It is this: That, to support the exclusive pretensions set up by our brethren, it is by no means sufficient for them to show that the apostles *sometimes* used immersion in administering baptism. For the question in debate is, not whether immersion be a *lawful*, but whether it be the *only* lawful, mode of baptism. Were they proving merely the lawfulness of this mode, it would indeed be enough to justify it, if they could adduce one or more instances in which it was used by apostolic administrators. But this

is not the case. We make no attack on their practice; we allow the validity of immersion. They attack us, by denouncing our practice as unscriptural and unwarrantable: and, therefore, it is incumbent on them to prove, not only that the apostles, in a few instances, immersed their subjects of baptism, but that, in all cases, they immersed them, and never used any other mode of administering this Christian rite.

To illustrate this matter, let us suppose a dispute between two persons with regard to the posture proper in prayer. In performing this holy duty, the one kneels, and the other stands, before the Lord. The former, not only gives a preference to his posture, but maintains it to be the only proper posture for a sinner: he insists that to stand in prayer, is to pray in an unscriptural and unwarrantable manner. To support his opinion, this zealous Christian turns over the leaves of his bible to collect the several cases on record, in which it appears holy men prayed in a kneeling posture; and then, with an air of triumph, produces them to convince his opponent, that he is acting against the authority of scripture, and the practice of ancient saints. His opponent replies, These cases by no means settle the question in dispute. They are sufficient, I acknowledge, to prove kneeling before God in prayer a becoming posture; which I do not pretend to deny: but, surely, they do not establish your position, that it is the *only lawful* attitude of

body in performing this duty. To make out your point, and justify the censures which you have taken the liberty to pass on me and others, whose practice varies from yours; you ought, at least, to prove the sacred scriptures to contain no case, in which the kneeling posture was not used by holy men. But this can never be done. From experience I find, that, by using a different attitude, I can pray more to my own edification. On this account, I prefer standing before the mercy-seat of my God: and, in the practice of ancient saints, who often used this posture, I find a complete warrant for my conduct, and feel assured that, if the heart be engaged in prayer, it is of little consequence what attitude may be assumed by the body. It is obvious, which of the two disputants would have the best in this argument.

Thus, stands the matter in the case before us. Although the advocates of immersion could adduce recorded instances of baptism, which made it indubitable, that, on those occasions, this mode was used by the apostles; yet it would, by no means, be sufficient to prove it the only lawful one, and the use of any other destructive to the ordinance. To support their exclusive claims, it is incumbent on them, at least, to show that there is not on record, in the whole New Testament, a single case of baptism, in which it was administered by a different mode: because a solitary case would decisively prove against their pretensions, that our Lord has not re-

stricted the administration of his sacred rite to any one mode, exclusive of all others.

I make this statement, not to concede recorded cases to be evidently in favour of immersion, while only one or two can be urged in justification of our practice; but simply to give you a correct view of the question in debate, and to let you see, that evincing the validity of immersion, is utterly insufficient to prove the unlawfulness of all other modes of baptism. Neither truth nor candour requires us to make such a concession: because the cases of apostolic baptism found in sacred history, furnish probable evidence of the ordinance having, on these occasions, been administered, not by immersion, but in some other way.

The question being thus fairly stated, let us proceed to examine these cases, and see on which side the evidence preponderates; whether in favour of immersion, or in favour of some other mode. For the sake of shortening these letters, already extended far beyond my original intention, I shall forbear to treat of the baptism of John, our Lord's forerunner: not, however, because we have any reason to fear his practice as looking at us with an unfriendly aspect, but for this plain reason, his was not Christian baptism.

In support of this assertion, various considerations, drawn from the station occupied by this singular man, might be urged. But I may safely wave them, and rest the truth on an appeal to evidence

arising from a fact recorded by an inspired historian. Paul, he informs us, rebaptized, at Ephesus, in the name of the Lord Jesus, certain disciples who had been previously baptized by *John*, Acts xix. 1—7. This fact presents decisive proof, that *John's* baptism was not Christian baptism: for, if it had been, where was the necessity or propriety of administering again the sacred rite, to persons who had already received it agreeably to our Lord's appointment?

By a forced construction of the passage referred to, it has been attempted to make it appear these disciples were not rebaptized. The fifth verse, it is said, must be considered as part of Paul's address to them; and as stating that, as *John* taught the applicants for his baptism to "believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ," he *virtually* baptized them in the name of the Lord Jesus. But examine, my brethren, the narrative, and you will see this to be a very forced construction indeed. There is nothing in it about a virtual baptism. It is stated expressly, that these disciples "were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus;" not *virtually*, but *really*: and, it is evident, the fifth verse must be considered as the words of the historian; for the expression "*When they heard this,*" proves that this verse cannot, without doing violence to the narrative, be made a part of Paul's address; but must be regarded as the language of the historian, informing us of the act that followed

the apostle's instruction. Paul speaks in the second, third, and fourth verses: and the explanation which he gave of the nature of John's baptism, was intended to show these disciples, how it imposed an obligation on them to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus; whom his forerunner John taught the people to expect, and duly to receive at his manifestation. The historian then proceeds to declare the effect of this address; that these men, convinced of their duty, readily received Christian baptism at the hands of Paul. Had the fifth verse been intended as part of the apostle's address, his interpretation of the instruction given by John to the people, would not have been interrupted by the phrase, "*When they heard this,*" with which that verse begins; but the remainder of it, excluding this unnecessary phrase, would have been immediately connected with the fourth verse by means of a copulative conjunction. The baptism of John was "a baptism of repentance," (v. 4) attended with some instruction relative to the promised Messiah; he did not, however, baptize in the name of the Lord Jesus: but Paul and his fellow apostles baptized explicitly in this divine name. See v. 5.

On the whole, it appears evident, these disciples were really baptized by Paul, although they had been previously baptized by John: and this fact furnishes decisive evidence of the baptism established by our Lord for his church being essenti-

ally different from that administered by his harbinger John.

This truth settled, we proceed to examine the cases of baptism which occurred after our Lord's ascension into heaven; without stopping to inquire what mode was used by John in administering his rite. Suffer me, however, to make this passing observation, that, considering the great multitudes which flocked to him for baptism, it appears highly improbable that even he baptized by immersion. See Mat. iii. 5, 6.

The first instance of baptism after the ascension of our Lord, was that of the three thousand on the day of Pentecost. Concerning them it is expressly stated, that they were baptized *the very day* on which the Holy Ghost descended upon the apostles: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and *the same day* there were added unto them about three thousand souls." In contemplating this case, the question occurs, How were these numerous converts baptized? Consult the sacred narrative, and you will find it silent with regard to the mode used on this occasion. It simply states that they were baptized: and we are left to infer the mode from a view of circumstances connected with the case. Let us consider these circumstances.

It was about nine o'clock in the morning,* when Peter began to preach. We may reasonably suppose

* Acts ii. 15. As the Jews began their day at six in the morning, their third corresponds with our ninth hour.

that, on this ever-memorable day, when such glorious success attended the preaching of a once crucified, but now exalted Saviour, he and his fellow apostles occupied a considerable space with their discourses to the listening and astonished crowds. The sacred historian has not given us the whole even of Peter's sermon. Nothing more than the great outlines of it are recorded. In the close of his narrative we find it written: "With many other words did he (Peter) testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation." We may, therefore, conclude it to have been twelve o'clock before the apostles ceased preaching, and proceeded to the baptism of their converts.

The administrators of the ordinance, on this occasion, were in number *twelve*. It appears from the narrative, we confess, that the Holy Spirit was shed down upon other disciples of our Lord, beside his apostles. The mere reception of miraculous gifts, however, did not empower those who had not received a commission to that effect, to administer sacred rites. Cornelius, the Roman centurion, and his friends, convened at his house when Peter preached the gospel to them, received similar gifts;* but it cannot be supposed that they were, by this heavenly donation, invested with power to baptize and administer the Lord's supper. Before a man, how enriched soever by gifts spiritual or miraculous, can lawfully undertake the administra-

* Acts x. 44, 46.

tion of these Christian ordinances, he must receive a regular commission; either from the great Head of the church, or from the hands of his ministering servants empowered to give it in his name.

Desirous of increasing the number of persons officiating on this occasion, some take the liberty of supposing the apostles were assisted by a part of the seventy, whom our Lord had once sent out to preach the gospel. But the narrative affords no ground for such a supposition. It makes but one distinction between the disciples: it divides them into two classes; one formed by the apostles, and the other, by the rest of our Saviour's followers. It tells us expressly, that Peter, rising to preach, stood up with the *eleven*.* The commission of the seventy was temporary: it expired when they returned and gave to Christ an account of its fulfilment. It was a commission to preach, not to baptize: the account of it by Luke contains not a word about baptism.† They were sent out before Jesus to preach in cities and places which he intended to visit in person; and, for the confirmation of their doctrine, they were empowered to work miracles. While our Saviour remained on earth, none of his disciples, except the twelve apostles who constantly attended on his person, were authorized to administer baptism: and the grand commission to preach and to baptize, given just before his ascension into heaven, was limited to his apostles, now reduced, by the death of

* Acts ii. 14.

† Luke x.

Judas, to eleven.* Admitting, then, the presence of some of the seventy on the day of Pentecost, we can find nothing, either in the sacred narrative of its memorable events, or in the temporary character as preachers sustained by these men, to warrant the supposition that they assisted in the administration of baptism to the three thousand converts. But, on the contrary, as their commission did not invest them with authority to baptize, and as the commission given by our ascending Redeemer, was limited to the apostles, we have reasonable ground for concluding, that none of the seventy were competent to aid in administering the ordinance on this glorious day.

Now, compare the number baptized with the number of administrators of the rite, and you will see it highly probable that immersion was not used on this occasion. Divide the former by the latter, and the result will give to each apostle two hundred and fifty subjects of baptism. Allow to each application of the ordinance, by immersion, not more than three minutes, and you will find, even supposing the apostles took no rest after the fatigue of preaching, but proceeded without delay to administer baptism, and continued in the duty without intermission, that the baptizing of so many individuals, must have employed them till some time in the morning of the next day. I ask, then, whether it can appear credible to any reasonable person, that

* Mat. xxviii. 16—20. Mark xvi. 14—18.

the apostles consumed so many of their precious hours by adopting a tedious mode of applying baptism, when, by using a more expeditious one, the work might have been performed in a much less time? It is highly improbable. The very circumstances of the case constrain us to believe, that these holy men, who, to use the expression of one of them, were “sent, *not to baptize, but to preach the gospel,*”* administered baptism on this memorable day, in a way more convenient and expeditious than immersion.

Our reasoning has hitherto proceeded on a supposition the most favourable to immersion; on the supposition of the apostles having had easy access to a collection or stream of water large enough for using this mode. But, it is a well known fact, there was no river near Jerusalem of depth sufficient for the purpose. To get rid of this difficulty, some have supposed that the apostles were allowed to use the water belonging to the temple. The supposition is unreasonable. This water was appropriated to sacred purposes, and accessible only to Priests and Levites: and it cannot be imagined, with any shadow of probability, that those who had the charge of it, diverted it to a common use, by granting the apostles liberty to baptize with it in the name of Jesus, whom the priests regarded as an impostor, and had very lately crucified as a blasphemer. And although we suppose some of these

* 1 Cor. i 17.

bitter enemies of our Saviour to have been, on this triumphant day, subdued and converted to the Christian faith, yet we cannot believe, that they allowed the apostles and their converts to come within the sacred enclosure around the brazen sea and lavers; because it was lawful only to themselves and the Levites to enter that court, and make use of the consecrated water.* Years elapsed before Jewish believers, excessively attached to the rites and laws of Moses, could receive the truth, that the Sinai-covenant, and all that system of typical worship established by it, were abolished by the introduction of Christianity.

From the circumstances, then, of this case, we may fairly conclude, that immersion was not used in baptizing the three thousand converts on the day of Pentecost.

The next instance of baptism is that of the Ethiopian eunuch. Acts viii. 26—40. This is supposed to furnish decisive evidence in favour of immersion. He went down into the water, and he came up out of the water, say its advocates; and, with an air of triumph, they ask, Who can deny that this man was immersed?

Allowing every thing which can in reason be demanded, and even admitting for a moment that the eunuch was immersed; we may, with perfect confidence, retort upon our opponents, and demand of them, how this case can support their position.

* See description of the temple by Brown and Prideaux.

Lose not sight, my brethren, of the question in debate. It is not whether immersion be a lawful mode, but whether it be the *only* lawful mode of baptism: for those who denounce our conduct, contend, not only that their practice conforms to apostolic example, but also that ours contravenes divine authority. We, therefore, demand, Does this case of baptism affirm our mode to be unscriptural? Does the sacred historian state it as a fact, that the apostles always administered the ordinance by immersion? Does he pronounce effusion, washing, and sprinkling, to be so repugnant to the very nature of baptism as to render it a nullity? Read the passage again, and you will discover not a word of all this. Allowing, then, the eunuch to have been baptized by immersion, what will it prove? Simply, that this is a *lawful* mode. But, assuredly, it cannot prove it to be the *only lawful* way in which baptism can be administered.

Candor, however, does not demand from us this concession. It may fairly be made appear probable, that immersion was not used on this occasion.

Certain it is, that the narrative is silent with regard to the particular manner in which the eunuch was baptized. The words of the historian, on which so much reliance is placed by the advocates of immersion, contain no statement of the mode. He does indeed say, "*They went down into the water, BOTH PHILIP AND THE EUNUCH.*" But was this act of going down into the water baptism? If it were, then

Philip, as well as the eunuch, was baptized; for both performed the same act. If it were, why was it added by the historian immediately after his account of this act, “*And he baptized him?*” The fact is, and it will appear to any one attentively reading the sacred narrative, that the baptism of the Ethiopian was subsequent to his being in the water: both he and the Evangelist were in the water, before the latter administered the ordinance to his convert. How he did it, whether by plunging his whole body under water, or by applying a small portion of the significant element to his face, we are not informed: and to determine the question, we must, as in the case already examined, reflect upon the circumstances of this baptism, and, after a candid and impartial view of them, decide in favor of that mode which may appear to be supported by the strongest probable evidence.

What were the circumstances of this case? The Ethiopian was on a long journey, returning to his own country from Jerusalem, whither he had gone to worship the true God. Philip was directed by the Spirit to meet him at a certain place. At his invitation, he ascended his chariot, and preached to him the gospel, by expounding a passage in the Old Testament, referring to Christ, which this man happened to be then reading. The eunuch believed. Seeing water near the road, he expressed a desire to be baptized: and, on the profession of his faith, Philip yielded to his request, and administered to him the Christian or-

dinance. Now, in order to a decent administration of baptism, it was natural for them to descend from the chariot, and go to the water. It would have been unbecoming the humility required on such an occasion, to have remained in the chariot, and directed a servant to bring the element to them. As the ancients wore sandals, not shoes, it was no inconvenience to them to walk through any small stream: we may, therefore, grant to our brethren the most that can be reasonably requested—that Philip and his convert went *into* the water.*

But to conclude, from this single circumstance, that the eunuch was baptized by immersion, will appear unwarrantable, if we impartially consider the other circumstances connected with this case. They make it probable a more convenient mode was used. Before such a conclusion be drawn, it ought, at least, to be proved, that the water was deep enough for immersion. This, however, cannot be done. The manner in which the Ethiopian speaks of it, intimates the contrary to have been the fact: for he does not say, See, here is a river, or here is deep

* The prepositions *εις* and *εκ*, here, and in the next verse, rendered *into* and *out of* the water, frequently signify *unto* and *from*, as every one must allow who understands the *Greek* language; and thus they are often used in the style of the New Testament, and particularly of Luke: as for example, *εις* signifies *unto* in Matth. xv. 24. Luke iv. 5. and vi. 12. and ix. 28. Acts xiv. 21. and Colos. i. 20. And *εκ* signifies *from*, Luke xx. 4. John xix. 12. Acts xiv. 8. and xv. 21, 29. and xvii. 3, 31. and xxvii. 34. Guyse's note on this place.

water; but, *See, here is water:* implying that, for the due administration of baptism, is required only water, and that a small quantity will answer the purpose, as well as a greater. This interpretation receives confirmation from the testimony of travellers, who represent this water as a spring, issuing from the foot of a mountain.*

Besides, if the water had been sufficiently deep, other circumstances forbid the supposition of immersion having been used. Is it reasonable to suppose, that this man, while prosecuting a long journey, was plunged into the water with all his clothes on, and subjected to the inconvenience of changing them in a desert place; when a different mode, such as was used in baptizing the three thousand on the day of Pentecost, would have answered the purpose? Surely this would be going against probability.

The Evangelist, in his mode of administering this Christian rite, we presume, happily alluded, as Henry observes, to a passage in Isaiah, which the eunuch had doubtless just read; for it stands in the

* Acts viii. 36. *Τὴν ὕδωρ*, a *certain water*, seems to be of diminutive signification, and to intimate, that it was not water of any considerable depth: and Jerome, Sandys, and other travellers, speak of it as a certain spring or fountain, that rises at the foot of a mountain in the tribe of Judah or Benjamin, whose waters are sucked in by the same ground that produces them; and they report that this was the place where the eunuch was baptized by Philip. Vide Hieron. de Locis. Hebr. pag. 41. and Sandy's Travels, lib. ii. p. 142.

Guyse's note on this place.

prophet but a few verses before the two specified by the historian as being under the eye of this man, when Philip came up to his chariot. He was then reading the 7th and 8th verses of the 53th chapter of Isaiah; the passage to which we refer, is the last verse of the chapter next preceding. The words are these: "So shall he (Christ) *sprinkle* many nations." How has this prophecy been fulfilled? Christ has sprinkled many nations with his atoning blood, and with the influence of his Holy Spirit shed down upon them: and these nations have, by his ministering servants, been *sprinkled* with baptismal water, as an appointed visible sign of the blessing so bestowed on them.

Considering, then, all the circumstances of this case, I ask you, my brethren, whether candor require us to yield it favoring immersion; and whether it do not appear propable the eunuch was baptized in a more convenient way, as by applying water to his face? In my view, the latter corresponds with circumstances much better than the former: and, consequently, the conceding of this case to our opponents, by some who do not admit their exclusive claims, seems to have resulted from want of careful investigation.

The baptism of Paul comes next in order. Acts ix. 17, 18. The circumstances attending his case make strongly against immersion. In the narrative, we find no intimation of his having been conducted to a place convenient for using this mode: but, on

the contrary, we discover several circumstances to render it probable, that he was baptized in the very apartment in which Ananias found him sitting, when he delivered to him his message from Jesus Christ: “And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales; and he received sight *forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.* The narrative, you will observe, is rapid, and implies strongly, that baptism was administered to him immediately after the restoration of his sight. During three days, he had been blind, and had taken neither meat nor drink: (v. 9) it cannot, therefore, be doubted that, when Ananias addressed him, he was sitting or lying down in his apartment. Now, the narrative, concise and rapid as it is, notices the change made in his posture previously to his baptism: “He *arose, and was baptized:*” and it informs us of another circumstance worthy of remark, that notwithstanding his long fasting, which, together with anguish of mind, must have weakened him greatly, he was baptized *before* he had taken any nourishment; for, immediately subsequent to the account of his baptism, the narrative states, “And when he had received meat, he was strengthened.” But not the slightest hint is given of his having been conducted by Ananias even from one apartment to another, for the purpose of baptizing him; much less, of his having been led out of the house to some river or large collection of water, for the sake of immersion.

In view of these circumstances, can it be imagined, that this case of baptism was performed by immersion? If the ordinance had been thus administered, would not the historian, who notices the act of rising, have given, at least, some *hints* of more important circumstances? Would he not have hinted at some preparation made for a mode of baptism so inconvenient to one in Paul's situation? Would he not have given some intimation of his having been conducted by Ananias from the house in which he found him, to some other place, or from one apartment to another, that water sufficient for immersing him might be obtained? Can it, then, in the total absence of the slightest hints of this kind, be credited, that Paul, in such circumstances, so enfeebled by long fasting and bitter distress of mind, was, previously to his taking any nourishment, led forth by Ananias to a river or other large collection of water, for the purpose of administering baptism to him by immersion? Is it not reasonable to suppose, if this mode had been used, Ananias would, before proceeding to baptize his convert, have directed him to sit down to meat, in order to recover a little strength? But the reverse took place: and, therefore, in view of this fact, and other circumstances, we conclude, that Paul was *not immersed*, but baptized in a way more suitable to his enfeebled condition.

The baptism of the Roman centurion and his friends, stands next on record. Acts x. 44—48. No-

thing to favour immersion can be found in this case. The sacred historian gives not the slightest hint of their having been led to some river or large collection of water. On the contrary, it may be inferred from the narrative, that these first fruits of the Gentile-world were baptized in Cornelius's house, in which they were assembled to hear Peter preach the gospel, and where the Holy Ghost fell on them; and that, for the administration of the ordinance, water was brought into the apartment which they occupied. "Can any man," exclaimed Peter, astonished at the miracle wrought in their favour, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" Weigh, my brethren, the apostle's expression: *Can any man FORBID water?* Does the form of this question favour the idea of Cornelius and his friends having been conducted to some stream or river? May we not fairly infer from it, that water was brought to them in some vessel, and that they were baptized by an application of the element to their faces? The historian's silence about any change of place, and the form of Peter's expression, while they discountenance the supposition of the use of immersion on this occasion, furnish a degree of probable evidence, that the ordinance was administered in some more easy and convenient way.

Nor does the case of Lydia favour immersion.* She was at the river's side, when Paul preached the

gospel to her and other women, assembled in a proseucha* or an oratory: and, if she were baptized there, we confess there was no want of water sufficient for the use of this mode. Let us concede it as a fact, that the ordinance was administered to her at the river's side, and see what will be the result of a fair examination of all the circumstances of her case. This woman went thither, not for the purpose of bathing, but to perform her devotions in the proseucha: and, as her purpose in going to that place did not require it, she took no change of apparel, either for herself, or for her household. How, then, were they baptized? Because the ordinance was administered at the side of a river, shall we infer that they were immersed? What! did the apostle immerse them, although they had no change of raiment at hand? Was this woman, together with her family, sent back to the city completely wet, to be gazed at by every one that saw them in such a plight! Who can believe that Paul placed them in a condition so ridiculous, when, by the use of another mode of baptism, such as was adopted on occasions already considered, it was so easy to avoid it? To get over this difficulty, it may be supposed, that some one of the family was dispatched to the

* What is translated, "*Where prayer was wont to be made,*" means a Jewish proseucha, or place made for prayer. It was an open court or enclosure, like those about the temple at Jerusalem; and it appears from history that, in many heathen countries where the Jews resided, they built them for private devotions. Prideaux, vol. i. p. 387—9.

city, for a change of apparel for each candidate for baptism. But, my brethren, the narrative affords no ground for this supposition. The historian speaks not a word about any person having been sent on such an errand; nor does he give the slightest hint, from which it can be fairly inferred that a change of raiment was procured. It is also worthy of remark, that it does not appear there was any convenient place, in which females could, with decency, make a change of their dress. The Jewish *proseuchæ* were open courts or enclosures, accessible to men as well as to women; and not at all fit for performing an act requiring so much concealment.

Taking all the circumstances of this case into view, we are constrained to give it as our judgment, that Lydia and her household were not baptized by immersion.

The baptism next occurring, and the last mentioned in the Acts of the apostles, is that of the jailor and his family. Acts xvi. This case, fairly considered, presents strong evidence against immersion. Paul and Silas were bleeding with stripes just inflicted; the city was thrown into confusion and consternation by an earthquake; the violence of its shock was so great as to force open the prison-doors, and to loose the prisoners' bands; and it occurred at midnight. These circumstances plainly forbid the supposition, that the jailor conducted his heavenly instructors to a river for the purpose of receiving, for himself and family, baptism by immersion. This

would have been a hazardous deed: for had he been seen leading through the streets, at midnight, his prisoners, whom he was charged to keep safely, it might have cost him his life.

Discarding a supposition so extravagant, let us observe attentively the sacred narrative. From the narrative, then, it is evident, that the Philippian jailor brought Paul and Silas out of that inner prison, where he had made their feet fast in the stocks to some other apartment; that in this apartment he made his solemn inquiry, and they answered it by preaching the gospel to him and to others. It likewise appears from the narrative, that in *this* room, after having washed their stripes,* he and his family were baptized; and that, subsequently to the administration of the sacred ordinance, he conducted them to his house, and set "meat before them."

In view of these circumstances, we ask, How were these heathen baptized? No river flowed through the prison. Yet, say the advocates of an exclusive mode, they were immersed; and, that water sufficient may not be wanting, they provide a bath in this prison! Here they resort to mere supposition, for which the sacred historian furnishes no ground. We have carefully read his account, but cannot learn that he was acquainted with the supposed fact. Certain it is, he speaks not a word

* "*He took them,*" (verse 33) means not that he conducted them to some other apartment; for that act is expressed by another word, *He brought them out:* (verse 30) but only his proceeding to wash their stripes.

about it: nor is there, in any of those other cases where a bath must be provided in order to surmount the difficulties in the way of immersion, any mention made of one, or the slightest hint given to lead to such a supposition.

Surely, such unauthorized suppositions are not allowable, in supporting an opinion which not only asserts the lawfulness of immersion, but denounces every other mode of administering baptism as utterly unlawful; and thus reduces to the state of unbaptized persons, at least, more than half the Christian world, and deprives myriads and myriads of the seal of that covenant, which is all their salvation, and all their desire! Surely, an opinion attended with consequences so serious and important, and fixing on the great body of professing Christians a reproach, similar in import to that in the mouth of a Jew when he called the heathen *uncircumcised*, should disdain receiving support from mere supposition; a supposition too which can find no countenance from the passage it proposes to explain!

Abandoning suppositions not warranted by the narrative, let us determine the question by a candid regard to the circumstances which it presents for consideration. The jailor, as already observed, brought Paul and Silas out of the inner prison into another apartment; and, so far as a judgment can be formed from the narrative and the circumstances before noticed, it appears, that in *this apartment*

the ordinance was administered. The conclusion, then, seems highly probable, that this heathen and his family were baptized, not by immersion, but in some other mode, more convenient, and better corresponding to the condition of the apostles and their converts, and to the circumstances of time and place. This conclusion receives additional proof, when we reflect that the jailor brought his prisoners out of the inner prison to another apartment, not for the purpose of being baptized, but in order to propose that all-important question which so greatly agitated his mind. His grand inquiry was made to them after he had changed their apartment: He "brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" This apartment to which they were conducted, was not selected because it contained water for the administration of baptism; for the jailor, having as yet neither proposed his question, nor received an answer to it, could then have entertained no idea of being baptized.

On the whole, considering that this heathen and his family were baptized at midnight, not in a river, but in an apartment of the prison; that this apartment had been selected with no view to the administration of baptism; and that the supposition of a bath having been used for the purpose, is utterly unwarrantable: we may fairly conclude that they were *not immersed*, but baptized by applying water to the face.

I have now examined the several cases of baptism on record, which occurred after the ascension

of our Lord into heaven: and I confidently appeal to the candid reader, whether it does not appear, from a fair and impartial survey of the circumstances attending them, that these baptisms were performed, not by immersion, but in some other mode, as washing, sprinkling, or effusion. The case of the eunuch has been, incautiously and without necessity, given up as being decisive in favour of immersion: but a careful inquiry into the circumstances of his case, renders it probable that he was not immersed.

LETTER XIV.

No precept in favour of immersion as an exclusive mode.—The original word, BAPTIZE, examined.

CHRISTIAN BRETHERN,

IN my last was submitted to your consideration, a fair investigation of the circumstances connected with the several cases of apostolic baptism, recorded in that part of our inspired volume which is styled, The Acts of the Apostles. The result was, that, so far as a judgment can be formed from the history

of them, it does not appear, in a single case, to be *certain*, or *even probable*, that immersion was used in administering this religious rite.

But, to all our reasoning on these cases, the advocates of immersion will object, that it must be false, because this mode is enjoined by positive precept. Immersion enjoined by positive precept! Where? Let the precept be produced, and we submit; we shall renounce our reasoning on the subject, and acknowledge our error. And where, my brethren, do you imagine this positive precept is to be found;—this precept, which is to set aside the combined testimony of all the circumstances that have been examined and compared together, in order to ascertain apostolic practice in relation to baptism? Would you not expect to find it so plain and express, that “he who runs may read it?” Could you imagine this boasted precept couched in a *single word*, the meaning of which has been a subject of dispute among the learned for several centuries? Yet, strange as it may appear, this is fact! The only precept which can be produced, or which any pretend to offer, is the Greek term βαπτίζω, which our English bible properly translates *Baptize*.

It is contended that this word signifies to immerse. That it sometimes bears this signification, is not denied. It has, however, we maintain, other significations: it signifies to *wash*, to *pour*, and to *sprinkle*. But, say the advocates of an exclusive mode, the primary sense of the word, is to immerse.

This is irrelevant to the point in dispute. Keep, my brethren, the question in view. What is it? Not whether immersion be a lawful mode of baptism. Were this the question, an endeavour to prove that the word primarily signifies to immerse, would be pertinent. But this is not the question: it is one wholly different; namely, Whether immersion be the *only lawful* mode in which baptism can be administered. This being the question, what can it avail to prove the primary meaning of the word to be that of immersion, while, like a thousand other terms, it has several different significations? Were our brethren able to demonstrate their point in the most satisfactory manner, it would still be fair to ask, Which of its several significations does the word bear in connexion with Christian baptism? For words, it is well known to those who have studied the nature of human language, undergo, in the course of years, great alterations in their meaning; and sometimes they obtain current, popular significations very different from their original import. Thus, in our own language, the word *let* has two opposite meanings. It signifies to *permit*: as, Let me do it; and it signifies to *hinder*: “For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now *letteth* will *let*, until he be taken out of the way.” The word *church* signifies both a Christian society, and a building consecrated to religious worship. The term *house* is used in sacred scripture as the name both of a common dwelling, and of the church

of Christ.* The Greek word χειροτονια, properly or primarily signifies a *stretching out of the hand*: yet the common meaning of it is an election of magistrates. The ancient way of choosing them was by stretching out the hand, and hence called χειροτονια: but afterwards the word was applied to any election of rulers, without regard to the mode. Εκκλησια, *Church*, signifies, in general, an assembly of people: and accordingly, in the New Testament, it means both an assembly lawfully convened by the civil magistrate: as in Acts xix. 39; and one unlawfully gathered: as in Acts xix. 32, 40, where it signifies what we call a *mob*. But most generally the writers of the New Testament mean by this word the *church of God*; that holy society, separated, by his word and Spirit, from the rest of mankind, for his worship and glory.

This list of terms, having various significations, might be greatly enlarged: but these few will serve as a specimen to show how words depart from their original meaning, and sometimes acquire, in common use, a sense that loses their primary ideas.

Admitting, then, it could be fairly proved, that βαπτίζω, baptize, in its primary sense, means to immerse, it would not settle the dispute; it would not prove immersion to be the only lawful mode of baptizing, and this term to contain a positive precept, enjoining the use of it. The question would still occur, Which of its several significations does the word bear in connexion with Christian baptism?

* Heb. iii. 4—6.

And, surely, it is unreasonable to contend, that a positive precept in favour of immersion, is couched in a single term, with respect to the meaning of which a question of this kind may, with the greatest propriety, be proposed; because an investigation might show it, in connexion with baptism, to be used, not in its primary, but secondary sense. To decide this question, an appeal must be made to apostolic practice: and, unless it can be shown that, on every occasion, the apostles baptized by immersion, the primary sense of the word will be little better than a rotten pillar in a building: It is utterly unable to bear the weight laid upon it. It can never prove, that every mode varying from the favourite one for which it is pleaded, renders baptism void, and that all who do not use it are unbaptized persons. This appeal has been made to apostolic practice: and the result is entirely unfavourable to immersion as an exclusive mode. There is not a single case of baptism on record, in the Acts of the Apostles, from which the use of immersion by these inspired guides, can be inferred with certainty, or even with a high degree of probability: much less can it be shown, that the apostles always administered baptism in this way, and never used any other. Were we, then, to yield the point, and allow βαπτίζω, baptize, in its primary signification, to mean to immerse, our practice would still be defensible: because apostolic example proves this word, in connexion with Christian baptism, not restrained to its

primary sense; and not only warranting the use of washing, pouring, or sprinkling; but that it is rather to be taken in one of these meanings, than in that of immersion.

But we are under no necessity of yielding this point. Much might be said to show, that to *immerse* is not the primary meaning of this controverted word.* It is, however, unnecessary to perplex your minds by entering into this difficult philological investigation. From the observations already made you may perceive, that the dispute is not to be settled by determining the primary meaning of this word; and that, at last, we must appeal to apostolic practice, in order to ascertain, whether, in connexion with Christian baptism, the term be restricted to one particular sense, or may be considered as comprehending its several meanings, and authorizing different modes of applying baptismal water. I shall, therefore, wave this discussion.

That you may not be misled by any show of argument on this much debated word, I shall state what ought to be proved with respect to its mean-

* Mr. Williams, in answer to Mr. Booth, has written largely, to prove that the primary signification of this term, is to *tinge*, to *dye*, to *wet*; and that to *immerse* is a *secondary* idea. The learned and justly celebrated Doct. Owen asserts: 1. "It doth not signify properly to *dip*, or *plunge*; for that in Greek is *ἔμβασσω* and *ἔμβασπιζω*. 2. It no where signifies to *dip*, but as a mode of, and in order to, washing. 3. It signifies *the dipping* of a *finger*, or the least touch of the water, and not plunging the whole. 4. It signifies to wash also in all good authors." Owen's Discourses, p. 581.

ing, in order to support the exclusive claims to baptism founded on it. One of these three points should be established by fair and decisive proofs: 1. Either that the word *never* had any other signification than to immerse;—2. Or that this is the *only* sense, in which it is used by the New Testament-writers;—Or that, in connexion with Christian baptism, it has, by *divine authority*, been limited to this single meaning. Now, if either of these points could be fairly made out, the question would be decided in favour of immersion.

Let it, however, be observed, that the question would then be decided only in favour of immersion *generally*, not in favour of a *total immersion*. To immerse signifies to *dip* any thing into water; which may be done either *partially* or *totally*. If I dip my finger, or hand, or foot, or body, I immerse it. The proving, therefore, of either of the particulars specified, would only evince that immersion was to be used in baptism, not that the *whole body* was to be plunged under water: and room would still be left for the question, Is the whole body, or a part of it, to be immersed?—to decide which, it would be necessary to consult the practice of the apostles: and, if it could not be shown that they immersed the whole body, the immersion of a particular part would be as lawful a mode of baptism, as covering every particle of it with water.

We are confident, that *neither* of these points can be established.

1. It cannot be proved, that βαπτίζω has but one meaning, and that it always signifies to immerse.

Unquestionably it signifies *to wash*, as well as *to immerse*. I am acquainted with no Greek Lexicon which does not give the word this meaning. That learned man, that profound divine, Doctor Owen, after citing in favour of this signification, the authority of Scapula, Stephanus, and Suidas, whom he styles the *great treasury* of the Greek tongue, makes the following declaration: “*I must say, and will make it good, that no honest man who understands the Greek tongue, can deny the word to signify TO WASH, as well as TO DIP.*”* In addition to these unexceptionable authorities, might be cited many other learned authors, who bear an unwavering testimony to this sense of the word. The authority of such writers, well skilled in that language to which the term belongs, is certainly decisive: it should satisfy the mind of every unlearned person, that βαπτίζω, baptize, does unquestionably signify *to wash*, as well as *to immerse*. The first point, then, must be given up as wholly indefensible. Indeed, I do not recollect that any learned writer, skilled in the Greek language, has, in contending for an exclusive mode of baptism, ventured to restrict the term to one meaning, and endeavoured to show that, always, and in all writings, it signifies to immerse.

2. It cannot be proved, that βαπτίζω is used by the New Testament-writers, in one sense only, and that this is to immerse.

* Owen's Discourses, p. 581.

Were authorities demanded in settling the point, the concurrent opinion of hundreds of learned and pious divines, who have examined this word, might be produced to show that, in the New Testament, it bears several meanings, and signifies *to wash, to pour, to sprinkle*, as well as *to immerse*. But the trouble of collecting quotations from the writings of these great men, is unnecessary; because no one can doubt this to have been their opinion, when he reflects that they were in the constant practice of baptizing, not by immersion, but by washing, effusion, or sprinkling; which conscience would not have allowed, had they been convinced that the word never signifies, in sacred scripture, any thing but to immerse.

Now, is it to be imagined, that all the learned, profound, and pious divines, who held this opinion, and acted on it in the administration of a solemn rite, were so grossly mistaken with respect to the meaning of an important word, as to have gone in opposition to the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, and lost, by their error, the very ordinance itself? Is it to be imagined, that, after all their frequent and mature investigations of the meaning of this word, and after all their repeated and fervent supplications to the great Head of the church for the teaching of his Holy Spirit, they failed in their search for truth, and still remained in this mournful error? That God should leave in error those who will not examine into the truth of their opinions, or

those who, confident of being right, pray, not that themselves, but that others may be led to know the truth, is not extraordinary. Nor is it extraordinary, that he should leave in unimportant errors, even sincere and praying Christians. But that he should suffer so many of his people, after all their inquiries about this matter, and prayers for the illumination of his Holy Spirit, to remain in a very important error; an error in its consequences so mischievous, as to deprive the larger part of his church of an ordinance designed for common use, and appointed as the mark of their separation from the world, is wholly incredible. But, my brethren, there is no necessity for resting this matter on the ground of authority. It may be set in such a light, as to let persons, unacquainted with the Greek language, see for themselves, that the word βαπτίζω, baptize, signifies in the New Testament, *to wash*, *to pour*, and *to sprinkle*.

1. It signifies *to wash*. This appears from a passage in Luke's gospel. At the invitation of a Pharisee to dine with him, Jesus went in and sat down to meat, without previously washing himself. This, being contrary to Jewish custom, and a tradition of the elders, excited great surprize: "And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed" (Greek *baptized*) "before dinner."* It would be extravagant to contend, that the word here means immersion of the whole body,

* Luke xi. 38.

and that neglect of this act excited the surprise of our Saviour's host.—Superstitious as the Jews were, they did not carry matters to such an extreme, as to hold it a duty to plunge their entire bodies into water before every meal. The washing deemed necessary, referred to the hands, as appears very evident from Mark vii. 2—5. “And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled (that is to say, with *unwashed*) hands, they found fault;”—and “asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with *unwashed hands?*”

In this passage, then, (Luke xi. 38.) the Greek word βαπτίζω, is correctly translated by the word *wash*; because the reason why the Pharisee marvelled, was, not that our Saviour had not *immersed* his hands, but that he had not *washed* them. The cause of wonder was the supposed *uncleanness* of the thing: and it will presently appear, that mere immersion of the hands into water, was not sufficient to comply with the Jewish custom. The defilement could be removed only by *washing*. Accordingly we find this very act, for the omission of which our Lord was censured, expressed in Mark vii. 2, 3. by a different word, νίπω; which signifies *to wash*, and not to immerse: and, therefore, it is plain that βαπτίζω, *baptize*, in one place, and νίπω, *wash*, in the other, must be equivalent terms. And that in both is meant *washing*, and not immersion, is further evident from the whole context of each pas-

sage; for it presents the idea of *cleansing* by washing:* “*Defiled*, (that is to say, with *unwashed*) *hands*.” Now, do ye Pharisees make *clean* the outside of the cup and the platter.”

Hence, it appears that the Jewish custom regarded, not the particular mode in which water was first applied to the hands, but the *washing* of them so as to make them *clean*. Had, therefore, our Lord and his disciples carefully washed their hands before eating, they would have complied with the tradition of the elders; and no surprize would have been excited, nor reproach called forth, by the particular mode of applying water, whether by taking it up in their hands out of a bason, or by having it poured upon them.† This circumstance was a matter of indifference.

In Mark vii. 3. we find another convincing proof, that the act prescribed by Jewish custom, was, not immersion, but washing. “For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft,” (in our translation, but literally, with the *fist*,) “eat not.” The word *πυγμῆ* has occasioned much perplexity to commentators: some translating it *oft*, others, *diligently*; some, *to the wrist*, and others, *to the elbow*. The literal translation, *with the fist*, is preferable to any of these; and no doubt suggests the true meaning. Wash with the fist! What is

* Mark vii. 2, 3, 4. and Luke xi. 38, 39.

† Pouring water on the hands for the purpose of washing them was, it seems, customary among the Jews. Elisha is described as one who poured water on the hands of Elijah. 2 Kings iii. 11.

meant? How shall we understand the import of this phrase? Reflecting on the difficulty, it occurred that our common mode of washing removes it, and satisfactorily explains the phrase. How do we wash our hands? *πυγμαῖς*, with the *fist*. First, water is poured upon the hands, or we take it up with them; and, then, closing the one upon the other, we rub them against each other, with the back of one shut against the palm of the other. This, in fact, is washing *πυγμαῖς*, with the *fist*. On examining Parkhurst's Lexicon, I was gratified to find that he explains the phrase in the same way.*

The kind of washing, then, which the Jews held to be a duty before eating, was that particular one which is effected by the *fist*, or by rubbing the back of one closed against the palm of the other, so as to cleanse them thoroughly from every pollution. Hence, it appears, that mere dipping them into water would not have been regarded by the Jews, as a compliance with the tradition of the elders; and that, in Luke xi. 38. the baptizing which our Saviour omitted before dinner, means, not *immersion* of the hands, but *washing* them with water.

From all that has been said on this passage compared with a parallel one, it is undeniable, that

* "If you shut your hand, the outside is called *πυγμα*. Hence the dative *πυγμα* being used, as it were adverbially, *πυγμα νιπτεσθαι τας χειρας*, literally to wash the hands with the fist, i. e. by rubbing water on the palm of one hand with the double fist of the other."

Parkhurst.

βαπτίζω, *baptize*, in Luke, is equivalent to *νίπτω*. *wash*, in Mark; and signifies *to wash*, without any regard to immersion.

We are furnished, in Mark vii. 4. with another proof, that this word signifies *to wash*: for there a substantive derived from it, is correctly translated *washing*. The passage reads thus: “And many other things there be which they have received to hold, as the washing” (Greek βαπτισμός, *baptisms*) “of cups and pots, of brazen vessels, and *tables*.” The last word, in the original, means *couches*, on which the ancients reclined while eating. Some of the articles mentioned might be washed by dipping them into water; but it cannot be supposed, that the Jews washed their couches in this way: these, it is highly probable, were washed by sprinkling or pouring water on them. With regard to one, at least, of the articles enumerated, the word βαπτισμός, *baptism*, must signify, not *immersion*, but *washing*. Besides, it is to be considered in reference to all, that in whatever way water was applied, it was done with a view to *wash* them. The leading idea of the term, therefore, is *washing*; and, whether water were, in the *first act*, applied by dipping, or by pouring, or by sprinkling, the cleansing of these articles was βαπτισμός. *a baptism, a washing*.

2. The word signifies *to pour*. “I indeed *baptize* you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; he shall *baptize* you with the Holy

Ghost, and with fire. For John truly *baptized* with water; but ye shall be *baptized* with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.”* A precious promise! How was it fulfilled? How did Jesus Christ baptize his apostles with the Holy Ghost, and with fire? Were they immersed in the Holy Ghost? Were they immersed in fire? How harshly this sounds! In Acts ii. 1—4, 16—18, 33, an account is given of the manner in which this promise was fulfilled. We are informed, that “there appeared unto them eleven tongues, like as of fire, and it *sat* upon each of them;” that “they were *filled* with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance;” that the miraculous influence of the Spirit was “*shed forth*;” and that this was a fulfilment of Joel’s prophecy, in which God had promised to “*pour out*” his “Spirit upon all flesh.”

Here is nothing like immersion. The apostles were neither *immersed* in the Holy Ghost, nor *immersed* in fire. But the Holy Spirit was *shed down*, *poured out* upon them, like rain from heaven. And it is worthy of remark, that, although the influences of this blessed agent, are often in scripture compared to water, yet in no place are persons ever said to be immersed in them. The sacred writers uniformly represent these heavenly influences under the idea of being *shed down*, *poured out*, and *sprinkled*. “I will *pour* water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will *pour* my Spi-

* Mat. iii. 11. Acts i. 5.

rit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring." Then will I *sprinkle* clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.—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."*

It is evident, from the address of John, and the promise of our Saviour quoted above, that there is a connexion between baptism and the Holy Spirit; that this rite is to those who receive it a sign of his purifying influences; and that they are bound by it to look and pray for them. It appears too that these divine influences are, in various places, represented as being shed down or poured out, like water or rain; and the reception of them is called a being baptized with the Holy Ghost. Hence, it follows, those who baptize by pouring water upon the subject, use a very apt emblem of the thing signified; and, by the application of the Greek term, baptize, in these two passages, they are fully authorized to use a mode so very significant.

The attempt to derive an argument from Acts ii. 2, in favour of immersion, is futile. "It filled all the house where they were sitting:" thus, say some, the apostles were, as it were, immersed. But we ask them, What filled the house? Not the Spirit; not the wind; but the *sound*. If, therefore, the apostles were immersed, they were immersed nei-

* Isaiah xliv. 3. Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 27.

ther in the Spirit, nor in the wind, but in the sound. A noble argument indeed! There is nothing, we repeat it, in this narrative like immersion. The Spirit is represented as being poured out, and shed down, like water. This is baptizing with the Holy Ghost.

3. The word βαπτίζω, baptize, signifies to sprinkle. "All our fathers," says St. Paul, "were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto (into) Moses in the cloud, and in the sea."* What does the apostle mean in this passage? Evidently this, that our fathers were thus initiated into the profession of the Mosaic religion, as we are initiated into the profession of Christianity by baptism. Baptism binds us to receive the new covenant, and to yield obedience to the precepts of Jesus Christ, who has made it known, and delivered it to us ratified by his blood: so the miraculous passage of our fathers through the sea, and the suspension of the cloud over their heads, bound them to receive the old covenant, and yield obedience to the laws of Moses, by whom it was delivered to them, ratified by typical "blood of calves and goats."† Thus, they were baptized into Moses, as we are "baptized into Jesus Christ."‡ This appears to be the meaning of St. Paul. He alludes, not to the mode, but to the *obligation* of baptism.

* 1 Cor. x. 1, 2.

† Heb. ix. 18—23.

‡ Rom. vi. 3.

If, however, the mode in which water was applied to our fathers, when they were baptized, must be discovered, it is easy to show that it was not *dipping*. But some imagine they can find proof of their favourite mode even in this historical fact. The cloud, say they, was over their heads, and the sea on each side; and thus they were immersed. A curious kind of immersion or dipping! Allow such an extravagant license to fancy, and every person baptized in this city, may be proved to have been immersed: for clouds were suspended over his head, and a river flowed on each side. Away with such ridiculous trifling.

It is certain, that the Israelites were not immersed in the sea; because, as Moses informs us, they “went into the midst of the sea upon the *dry* ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.”* If water were applied to them, it could have been in no other way than by drops from the cloud, and by a spray from the sea. Is this immersion? or is it sprinkling? Justly has it been observed, in reply to that licentiousness in which some indulge their fancy, while torturing this passage to make it speak for them, that the *Israelites* were *sprinkled*, but the *Egyptians* *immersed*: for, Moses says, “The waters returned, and *covered* the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them.—But the children of Israel walked upon *dry* land in the midst of the sea.”†

* Exod. xiv. 21, 22.

† Exod. xiv. 28, 29

You will find, my brethren, in Heb. ix. 10, a solid proof, that the word under consideration signifies *to sprinkle*. There the apostle informs us, that to the first covenant pertained divers *washings*; (Greek βαπτισμοίς, *baptisms*;) and, then, selects, as one standing preeminently among these divers baptisms, that ordinance which prescribed the *sprinkling* of the unclean with the blood of bulls, and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer.* This instance may be ranked under the head, “*earnal ordinances*;” a head so general as to comprehend all the Levitical ceremonies: but let it be observed, that, as all those *divers washings* or baptisms to which the sacred writer refers, were *purifying* rites, this purification by sprinkling of the blood of bulls, and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, has just claims to be considered as one of those *divers washings* or baptisms, which belonged to the first covenant. Purification, in whatever way effected, whether by a total or partial washing, or by sprinkling, was a *baptism*, a *washing*: it took away ceremonial uncleanness, as water, when applied to our persons or clothes, takes away from them any natural uncleanness which they may have contracted.

Sprinkling, then, is one of the significations comprehended under the general term βαπτίζω, *baptize*.

Thus, it has, I think, been fairly proved, that the Greek term, *baptize*, is used, by the writers of

* Heb. ix. 13. See Levit. xvi. 14, 18, 19. Numb. xix. 4, 20, and the whole chapter. Heb. ix. 18—22.

the New Testament, in different senses, and that it includes different modes of applying water; namely, washing, effusion or pouring, and sprinkling, as well as immersion.

III. Nor can it be shown, that divine authority has determined this disputed word shall, in connexion with Christian baptism, signify *only to immerse*. This restriction in its meaning, cannot be proved from the word itself, as used by the sacred writers; because, as we have just seen, they use it in different senses: it cannot be proved from the instances of baptism on record; because a fair and full examination of the circumstances of those narrated in the Acts of the Apostles, makes it probable some mode more convenient than immersion was used: nor can it be proved, from any particular passage of scripture, that our great Lawgiver has determined this word, although possessing different significations, yet shall, in connexion with baptism, bear only one: none will venture to assert a thing so utterly destitute of proof. It is, then, impossible to bring any satisfactory evidence to show, that the meaning of this word should be thus restricted.

LETTER XV.

An inquiry answered.—Rom. vi. 4. examined.—Recapitulation.—Import of baptism.—Conclusion of the discussion.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

RECOLLECT for a moment what has been said with respect to the Greek term *baptize*, and collect all the evidence to one point. It has been proved,

1. That this word has more significations than one:

2. That it is used by the sacred writers, in different ways, and signifies, in the New Testament, *to wash, to pour, and to sprinkle:*

3. That, in connexion with baptism, it has not been limited, by any positive precept of our great Lawgiver, to one particular sense.

This we have also proved to have been the deliberate opinion of many of the greatest, most learned, and pious divines that ever flourished in the Christian church: and that, on this opinion, they acted in the administration of baptism, which they could not have done with a good conscience, had they believed the term to signify only to immerse.

On the whole, we conclude it to be IMPOSSIBLE to find, in a word signifying *to wash*, *to pour*, *to sprinkle*, as well as *to immerse*, a precept prescribing, in all cases, the use of immersion. The nature of this term is such, that it authorizes the administration of baptism in different ways, corresponding with its different meanings; by washing, by effusion, by sprinkling, or by immersion.

Perhaps, my brethren, it may occur to you to ask, Why a more definite word was not selected, that would have allowed of only one mode of applying water, and thus made the practice of the church in administering baptism uniform? Such a term might doubtless have been chosen: and had the mode been a matter of moment, our Lord would have determined it, either by the selection of such an unequivocal word, or by some other clear expression of his will. He was pleased, however, to do neither: and, from this fact, we may safely infer the mode to be unimportant, and that, if water be applied in the name of the Sacred Three, baptism is duly and lawfully administered.

A writer of reputation in favour of immersion, reasons in a manner very illogical and unjustifiable. He seems, first, to fix in his own mind what our Lord ought to have done; and, then, attempts to prove that he has done so. His reasoning goes on the supposition, that the use of a word having more meanings than one, in a precept relative to baptism, would reflect on the wisdom of our great Lawgiver:

which supposition must necessarily imply another, that to allow more than one mode in applying baptismal water, is absurd. Is this legitimate reasoning? Shall any man be permitted, first, to assume his premises, and, then, to draw his conclusion? Grant this liberty, and what may not be proved? In all cases, this way of reasoning is unlawful; and more especially so when applied to the procedure of our glorious Legislator, in regard to a positive rite, the obligation and utility of which depend entirely on his sovereign will. Surely it behoves us to inquire, first, what he has been pleased to appoint, and, then, to submit to it as wise and good. But by no means does it comport with the duty which we owe to his infinite Majesty, to imitate this author; by, first, settling in our own minds what it became our Lord to appoint, and, then, persuading ourselves that he has made the appointment, under the notion that a different procedure would reflect on his wisdom. This^r would be to dictate to our sovereign Ruler, instead of yielding implicit obedience to his high appointments. There are, we admit, cases so clear, that, in regard to them, we may, with humble confidence, assert and contend such a particular line of procedure to be incompatible with the infinite perfections of God. This, however, is not one of the kind. It is a case of pure sovereignty. The institution of baptism resulted from the good pleasure of Jesus Christ; and, therefore, it is our duty to observe it, in every particular

in regard to which he has signified his will. But where he has left us at liberty, no mortal has a right to bind our conscience. Has he appointed baptism? It is our duty to submit to the ordinance. Has he directed the use of water? It is our duty to use this element. Has he commanded his ministers to baptize “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost?” It is their duty to pronounce this name of God, this sacred “form of sound words.” Has he limited the application of water to one mode? No: we are at liberty, therefore, to use more than one; to baptize by washing, by pouring, by sprinkling, or by immersion. And why should any mortal dare assume the boldness of asserting, that to allow such a liberty in regard to the mode, and to use a word, in the precept enjoining this rite, which secures it, would reflect on the character of our great Lawgiver; nay, that a procedure like this would disgrace the legislative wisdom of a British parliament?*

Jesus Christ has not appointed the use of one mode, exclusive of all others. The different significations of the generic term, baptize, and the cases of baptism on record, firmly establish this fact.

And where is the absurdity, or impropriety of allowing this liberty in the application of water? It is a matter of pure sovereignty. Had it pleased him, our Lord might have substituted any other li-

* Booth on baptism.

quid in place of water; or made the whole ordinance very different from what it is. What he has appointed is wise and good: and unlimited obedience due to his will, prohibits, on the one hand, *adding to*, and, on the other, *taking from*, his ordinance. The use of any other matter than water, or of any other form of words than that in the precept, would be to take from the ordinance; because Christ has prescribed both: but to insist on immersion as the only lawful mode of baptism, and to treat Christians administering this rite in a different way as unbaptized, is adding to it. Let us shun both these extremes; because they are alike contrary to the will of our sovereign Lord. To this subject we may apply the apostolic exhortation: “Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”

The arguments, founded on the term βαπτίζω, *baptize*, and on the cases of apostolic baptism, in favor of an exclusive mode, have now, I trust, been fairly refuted. These are the principal which the advocates of immersion plead. There is, however, another of imagined importance, grounded on a supposed allusion to this mode, in Rom. vi. 4. which I shall briefly consider.

Admitting, for a moment, what is claimed by our brethren, an allusion in this text to immersion, to what will the argument amount? Will it prove im-

mersion to be the only lawful mode of baptism? This it ought to prove, or it can be of no service in a contest, not merely for the lawfulness of immersion, but against the lawfulness of every other mode of baptism. Does Paul deny the validity of sprinkling, washing, and pouring? Does he say the church must baptize by immersion only? and that, if any presume to use a different mode, they will act contrary to the authority of her glorious Head, and deprive themselves of baptism? Not a word, not a hint to this effect, can be found in the passage. The utmost to be gained from it, is, that immersion was sometimes used by the apostles. But how absurd the attempt, from a bare allusion to a particular mode of baptism, to prove all others unlawful!

But why should this point be conceded? Logical reasoners, using any allusion as an argument, refer to facts well known to those to whom they write. Before, therefore, we can be required to grant, in this argumentative passage, an allusion to the mode of baptizing by immersion, it ought first to be proved to us that such a mode was really used in the apostolic church. But, so far as I can learn from recorded cases of baptism, it does not appear the apostles used immersion. Yet, I have admitted, and do admit this to be a lawful mode: because water may be applied in different ways, without affecting the validity of baptism. The mode is not essential. Still, however, no *positive* proof can be derived from holy scripture, to evince the use of immer-

sion by the apostles. So far as a judgment can be formed, by an impartial view of circumstances connected with the cases stated in sacred history, the probability is that they used a different mode. I ask, then, Does candor require us to admit, in this passage, an allusion to immersion?

In the next verse, the sacred writer says, “ We have been *planted together* in the likeness of his death. Is there in the mode of baptism any resemblance to planting? In the sixth verse, he affirms that our old man is *crucified* with Christ. Is there in the mode of baptism any resemblance to crucifixion? Yet these figurative phrases are the same in meaning with that of being “ buried with him by baptism into death.”

The text can be explained without supposing in it an allusion to any particular mode of baptism. The apostle’s object, in his whole argument, expressed in terms highly figurative, is, to prove that Christians may not live in sin. How does he establish this point? By pressing the obligations of baptism. What is its general obligation? Faith, obedience, and conformity to Christ: for we are “ *baptized into Christ.*” In what respects must we be conformed to him? In all things in which he is proposed as our example. He is our example, not only in his life, but in his death, in his burial, in his resurrection, and in his ascension: and, therefore, we are, by baptism, bound to imitate him in these points of his history; by dying to sin as he died for it; by

giving proofs of the mortification of sin, as he did of death by his burial; by rising and walking in newness of life, as he rose from the dead to die no more; and by setting our affections on things above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

Baptism is the seal of our engagements to be thus conformed to our glorious Head and Redeemer. We are, therefore, baptized into his life, his death, his burial, his resurrection, and his ascension into heaven; or, in other words, it may be said that, by baptism, we live with him, we die with him, we are buried with him, and so on.

It being the apostle's object to show, that Christians are bound by baptism to be conformed to Christ, both in his death and in his resurrection; why, if he alluded to immersion, did he not allude to that part of it which consists in rising from under water, as well as to that of being put under it? Both parts according to this plan of interpreting the text would have suited his purpose. This, however, is not done. The sacred writer does not say, *We are buried with him by baptism into death, and raised with him by baptism from the dead*; but omitting the latter, he uses only the former, phrase; which is followed by one in which baptism is not mentioned: "That like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also might" (not, rise by baptism, but) "walk in newness of life."

The passage and the context may be paraphrased thus: "Shall we continue in sin that grace may

abound? God forbid:" we abhor the thought as the height of impiety, and indignantly reject it, as an illegitimate inference from the doctrine which we have inculcated. For "how shall we that are," by profession and obligation, "dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ;" that is, dedicated by an appointed ordinance to his service and glory, brought into communion with his mystical body, the church, and, symbolically, into communion with himself; "were baptized into his death?" devoted to a conformity to his death, and laid under obligations to die unto sin, as Christ died for it, and derive influence from his death for the mortification of every evil propensity? Therefore, to pursue this idea, I may, with propriety, say, "We are buried with him by baptism into death:" the engagements of this holy ordinance make it our duty, not only to resist sin, but to prosecute the contest with a full determination to destroy it; and thus to give proofs of its mortification, as Christ did of his death, by being buried. The obligations of this Christian rite extend still further: we must rise with our Lord, "that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

On the whole, from this passage, acknowledged to be difficult in its interpretation, no clear proof can be drawn to establish the use of immersion by the apostles; and certainly no evidence at all to

prove it to be the only lawful mode of administering Christian baptism.

The sum of what has been said on the mode of baptism, is briefly this:

1. The consequences resulting from immersion, considered as exclusive of all other modes, are such as to constitute strong and decisive presumptive evidence that this opinion cannot be founded in truth.

2. Apostolic example, of which our brethren boast as being on their side, affords no countenance to those exclusive claims to baptism which they have ventured to set up. The circumstances attending the baptisms, performed by the founders of the Christian church, and recorded by an inspired historian, so far from proving the ordinance to have been *always* administered by immersion, do not furnish even *probable* evidence, much less *certain* proof, of their having used this mode on *either* of those occasions. A fair and impartial examination of these cases, makes it probable, that, in every instance, they baptized their candidates in a mode more convenient, and better adapted to time, place, and other circumstances.

3. The term βαπτίζω, baptize, which our brethren imagine to contain a positive precept in favour of immersion, is utterly unfit to answer the purpose for which it is pleaded: because it is certainly used, by the New Testament-writers, in different senses; and, therefore, as it has not been restricted, in con-

nexion with baptism, to one meaning, it authorizes the administration of this rite in different ways, by washing, effusion, and sprinkling, as well as by immersion.

4. That particular text (Rom. vi. 4.) in which St. Paul is supposed plainly to allude to immersion, furnishes no argument in favour of the exclusive claims of its advocates: for, in the first place, it can be explained, consistently with the scope of his reasoning, without admitting it to contain an allusion to any particular mode of baptism; and, in the second place, if such an allusion were really found in the text, it would only prove immersion to have been sometimes used by the apostles, but by no means evince the unlawfulness of other modes.

On this review of our arguments, it appears, I trust to your satisfaction, that the exclusive claims to baptism set up by those who practise immersion, can find no support from sacred scripture;—neither in our Lord's precept instituting the rite, nor in the practice of his apostles, nor in any particular passage of holy writ: and, therefore, that they are to be rejected as wholly unwarrantable. And it also appears, that, for the use of the mode adopted by our church, in which water is applied to the face of the person baptized, we find a complete warrant in the word of God; and, therefore, that we may repel the condemnatory censures passed upon it, as the fruit of error, and springing from misguided zeal.

Before I close this discussion on the mode, permit me, my brethren, to direct your attention to the grand import of Christian baptism. Its leading idea is that of *purification*; an idea conveyed by it in whatever way administered. In support of this position, the following considerations are submitted.

1. This was the import of those *divers baptisms* used under the former dispensation. By whatever mode administered, they were all appointed to cleanse from ceremonial pollution, and thus to teach the necessity of internal purification from the defiling nature of sin.

2. It is evident, from John iii. 25, 26. that purification was the import of John's baptism: for there the terms *purifying* and *baptizeth* are used synonymously. Both the Jews and John's disciples, it appears, considered baptism in the same light as a purifying rite. The subject in dispute between them, was, not the nature of baptism in general; for in this, as just observed, they were agreed: but the authority of John and of our Lord, to administer this rite, which the Jews seem to have contested. They contended for the baptisms or purifications appointed by Moses: and probably represented both the baptism of John and that of Christ, as innovations of dangerous tendency, and unnecessary, inasmuch as various purifications had been already prescribed. Your Master assumes the liberty to baptize: and lo! now, another, one lately baptized by him, takes the same liberty; and multitudes flock

to his baptism. Where will these innovations on established order end? By what authority does your Master purify?

Unable to answer this reasoning, and jealous for the honour of their Master, his disciples refer the matter to him: "They came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him." The baptist replies to their inquiry, and removes their difficulty, by declaring the preeminent dignity of Jesus Christ. Thus he asserts, in the strongest manner, his authority to administer baptism, a purifying rite; and shows their jealousy for his own reputation to be highly improper.* The inquiry, and the answer to it, evince that the dispute between John's disciples and the Jews, related to the authority of John and of Christ to administer baptism. In the general nature of it they were agreed: they considered it as a *purification*.

3. Various passages of the New Testament, suggest this as the grand import of Christian baptism: "And now, why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and *wash away* thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he hath saved us, by the *washing* of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the *washing of water*,

* John iii. 27, 36.

by the word." "Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts *sprinkled* from an evil conscience, and our bodies *washed* with pure water." "The like figure whereunto baptism doth now save us, (not the *putting away of the filth* of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."* In all these passages, baptism is alluded to as importing *purification* from sin.

4. Purification is the grand effect produced by the blood, and by the Spirit of Christ. The former, being sprinkled on the conscience, cleanses it from guilt; the latter, being shed down upon the heart, cleanses it from defilements: and thus the efficacy of Christ's blood, and the operations of his Spirit, unite in producing one grand result, purification of the human soul from all the stains and pollutions of sin. Now, baptism, in which water, that great purifier of nature, is used, was evidently intended to exhibit to us this grand result of the blood and Spirit of Christ. No ordinance more emblematical of purification could be devised. The sign represents very clearly the thing signified. This apt correspondence between the two, decisively proves baptism to have been instituted to exhibit to us, in a sensible and visible manner, that purification from sin which is effected by the blood and Spirit of Christ†.

* Acts xxii. 16. Tit. iii. 5. Ephes. v. 26. Heb. x. 22. 1 Pet. iii. 21.

† Rev. i. 5. Acts ii. 38.

These considerations discover the grand import of this sacred ordinance. The divers baptisms in use among the Jews, were purifications; John's baptism was a purification; various texts of scripture exhibit Christian baptism as a purification; and the great effect of the blood and Spirit of Christ, is purification: baptism, therefore, must be a purifying rite. Administer it as you please; by immersion, or by washing, or by pouring, or by sprinkling: you cannot change the import of that ordinance in which water, the great purifying element of nature, is used. It remains still the same; it is *an emblematical purification*. Hence it follows, that to contemplate baptism aright, we should not confine our view to any particular mode; but consider it as an ordinance, in which, by the application of water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, the Lord our Redeemer represents to our faith, and lays us under solemn obligations to seek, that inestimable blessing,—purification from sin by his blood and Spirit.

Such being the import of this Christian rite, the quantity of water used in its administration, is wholly immaterial. A small quantity will represent the great benefit intended, as effectually as a larger. Baptism, be it remembered, is “*not the putting away of the filth of the flesh:** it is not designed to be a *real* washing, so as to cleanse the body from defilements;† but only a *symbolical* washing, to sig-

* 1 Pet. iii. 21.

† Were baptism a real washing, it is clear, neither of the modes

nify, by the application of water, an apt emblem, the internal purification of the soul. Such being the design of this ordinance, it is manifest, that a small quantity of the significant element applied to the face, will answer this design as fully as plunging the whole body into a river: and as the blood of Christ, which cleanseth us from the guilt of sin, is represented in holy scripture as being applied by *sprinkling*; and the influences of the Holy Spirit, who cleanses us from the pollution of sin, are represented as being poured out or shed down upon us; it is likewise evident, that *sprinkling* or *pouring* water on the face, is very emblematical of the thing signified, and of the manner in which our purification is effected. The application of water to a principal part of the body, is a significant sign of universal cleansing. A certain woman, having poured ointment on our Lord's *head*, was reproved for wasting a precious article. Jesus justified her conduct, and said, in reply to the censures passed upon her, among other remarks, "She is come to anoint my *body* to the burying." Mark xiv. 3—9.

In a review of what has been said on the mode of baptism, we are authorized to deduce this as a

in use would answer the purpose. Certainly immersing a person with all his clothes on, and taking him immediately out of the water, is not sufficient to cleanse him from bodily defilements. When we intend really to wash ourselves, we strip off our garments, and bathe the body by remaining in water, and rubbing it with the water.

conclusion of the whole: That, although immersion is to be recognised as a lawful way of administering this holy rite, yet the application of water to the face by washing, sprinkling, or pouring, is to be preferred. This mode agrees best with recorded cases of apostolic baptism, is more convenient, and may be safely used to the sick and dying, or the tenderest infants: it is more congenial with the nature of our climate, and the genius of the present dispensation; and affords better opportunity for those devotional exercises, which claim the attention of adult recipients of this rite:—and, finally, it is more emblematical of the manner in which that great benefit, signified by baptism, purification by the blood and spirit of Christ, is represented as conveyed to us.

The discussion is now finished. Two important points, I have endeavoured to establish; namely, that children have a divine right to baptism, and that our mode of administering this holy ordinance is both lawful and scriptural. The evidence collected and exhibited, in support of these interesting truths, is submitted to your consideration, in confident expectation of its being sufficient to satisfy your minds, that the censures of our brethren are unwarrantable; and that the word of God affords a complete justification of our conduct in dedicating children to the Lord, and in baptizing, not by immersion, but by applying water to the face of the recipient.

But, my brethren, I must not close these letters, without leading you to some improvement of the important truths which have been illustrated and confirmed. Every religious truth has respect to practice; and, when embraced with a true faith, will have more or less influence on the temper and conduct. It is not sufficient to know the truth; we must reduce it to practice. In the ensuing letters, I propose to make, both to Christian parents. and to baptized youth, such an address as the principal subject discussed requires. This address, by bringing into view the important purposes contemplated by infant baptism, will serve to strengthen the evidence by which the right of children has been supported.



LETTER XVI.

An Address to Parents.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

THE letters, which you have read, make it evident, that the baptism of your children is a serious duty; a duty which you owe both to them, and to God.

You owe it to your children. By birth they obtained an interest in Abraham's covenant, and, consequently, a right to baptism, its appointed seal. You, therefore, whom God has made their natural

guardians, are bound to put them in the enjoyment of this covenant-privilege. Parents feel it as an obligation, which it would be criminal and unnatural to disregard, to manage any estate belonging to their children, until they arrive at age and take personal possession of it; and to secure to them any temporal advantage which may be in their power. And should they not feel it as a most weighty obligation, to bring them in the arms of faith, in order to have applied to them the seal of a covenant containing most glorious promises, and blessings of inestimable value? On you, parents, remember, it depends, whether your children shall, or shall not, enjoy their covenant-right; whether they shall wear the mark certifying the possessor to belong to the kingdom of Jesus Christ, or remain as unbaptized heathens. How willingly soever the church may open her bosom to receive them among her acknowledged children, and how ready soever her ministers may be to apply to them the appointed token of fellowship in her privileges; yet, if you be negligent of your duty, or unwilling to present them for baptism, they must grow up without this seal of God's gracious covenant, and will, through your fault, forfeit their birthright. And can a Christian parent be so cruel to his children, so negligent of their best interests, as to bring upon them so great a forfeiture? Where then are his bowels of love for his dependant offspring? Will parents labour, night and day, to lay up for their children an earthly trea-

sure? and will any refuse to do an act so easy, so reasonable, and so incumbent, as dedicating them to God in baptism, toward enriching them with a treasure in heaven?

By what I have just said with respect to the duty which a Christian parent owes to his children, let me not be understood to mean, that a neglect of this duty will throw an insuperable obstacle in the way of their salvation. I entertain no such idea: for, as thousands perish although baptized in infancy, so, on the other hand, a person, after having forfeited his covenant-relation to God, through his parents' neglect, may, by sovereign grace, recover it, and be finally saved in consequence of his personal repentance and faith. But it is impossible to tell what disastrous effects, a righteous God may suffer to spring from an omission of this incumbent duty. The sins of parents, being imitated by their children, often become the unhappy and guilty cause of their eternal ruin: and, in this way, a contempt or disrespect of a religious ordinance by parents, may be productive of consequences the most pernicious and lasting to their children. At any rate, neglect of their baptism sets children free from the restraints, arising from their dedication to God in this Christian rite; and free from the authority and discipline of the church, and the influence of those appropriate motives which it is incumbent on ministers to address to baptized youth, derived from their baptism and sealed relation to the church of Christ.

It is true they can never be released from the obligations resulting from dependance on God, their Creator and Governor. But this militates not at all against the propriety of laying them under additional obligations; because, if the former obligations rendered the latter unnecessary, it would prove the baptism of adults an unnecessary institution. The fact is, the natural depravity of man is such, that he needs restraints multiplied, his obligations increased, and motives of every kind addressed to his hopes and fears.

You owe the baptism of your children as a duty to God. He has not, it is true, said in so many words, *Dedicate your children to me in baptism;* but he has said what is equivalent. For he expressly commanded his ancient church to circumcise her infant members: he has plainly taught us that the covenant containing this positive precept, is still in operation; and that children, under the present dispensation, retain their interest in it, and membership in his church: and he has appointed baptism as the substitute of circumcision, the former token of his gracious covenant, and sign of church-membership. Thus has he signified his will in this matter: and surely it carries with it an authority little less than an express command.

No Christian parent, then, can neglect the baptism of his children, without incurring the guilt of acting in opposition to the divine will. Ignorance may lessen his guilt; but it cannot keep his con-

science free from its stains: and, therefore, whenever any person becomes convinced of his duty, he ought to ask forgiveness of this sin of omission, as well as of his other offences. By neglecting the baptism of their infants, parents withhold from Jehovah his own property: for the children of his covenant-people, he claims as his children;* and he commands their parents to have them impressed with the seal, by which he designates his own treasure. You have borne children unto God: and, surely, it must be your duty to acknowledge them to be his, by presenting them to his Majesty in that ordinance which he has appointed for this purpose.

With pleasure and gratitude, my brethren, should you comply with the divine will, in dedicating your children to the Almighty in holy baptism. It is a privilege highly to be estimated. Painful as was that rite, the Jews regarded circumcision as an invaluable favour: and justly too; for it certified them, that their children constituted a part of God's peculiar people, and were interested in the covenant made with their illustrious progenitor. Baptism certifies Christian parents of the same interesting truths: and the reception of it for their children should be regarded as an inestimable privilege; for unquestionably it must be so, to have our infants enrolled and sealed, with the broad seal of heaven, as members of that holy society to which God has made the promises of grace and salvation; a society formed on earth as a nursery for heaven, from which

* Ezek. xvi. 20, 21.

trees of righteousness are transplanted to better climes, to flourish and bloom with immortal vigour and beauty. Baptism is a badge of distinction more honourable, and, therefore, more to be desired for our children, than any that would mark them as members of a human society, though composed of men the most honourable, and invested with the greatest privileges. It distinguishes them as the citizens of Zion, as the disciples of Christ, as the subjects of his kingdom, and as candidates for heaven: it places them under the care, instruction, and discipline of his church, and gives them a peculiar claim to an interest in her prayers and blessings.

But, let it not be supposed that I inculcate as proper an indiscriminate admission of all children born of baptized parents to this Christian rite. The covenant-interest, ratified by baptism, may be forfeited by the misconduct of individuals; and, consequently, having lost their own connexion with the church, they cannot transmit to their children any right to her initiating ordinance. There are certain qualifications requisite in parents in order to entitle their infants to baptism: which not possessing, they have no claim to this covenant-seal for them; and ministers are in duty bound to refuse the application of it, although they should demand it as a right. But it ought never to be forgotten, that it is incumbent on all parents to seek these qualifications, with a view to secure to their children the great privilege of being received into the church.

by baptism. In this particular, the matter stands in reference to this ordinance, as it does in regard to the Lord's supper. The command to commemorate the death of our Redeemer, is binding on all persons; yet many have no right to sit down, and partake of his sacred feast appointed for that purpose; because they have not the required qualifications: still, however, the want of these qualifications does not exempt them from the obligation imposed by the Saviour's dying injunction; for this injunction makes it their immediate duty, to seek earnestly that preparation which will entitle them to commune with his people at the sacred table.

Improper applications for baptism are often made. Some imagine that, having been baptized in infancy, they have of course a right to present their children for the reception of this ordinance, although their conduct is so irregular and unchristian, as justly to exclude them from the privilege: and, because their application is not complied with, they think they are deprived of a right, and their children cruelly treated. These are false notions, which ought to be corrected. In the administration of baptism, ministers must be governed by the instructions of their Lord and Master, to whom they are responsible for their conduct in this as well as in every other particular. Whenever they apply the covenant-seal, it should be done, not as a favour to any individual, but as a duty the performance of which he has a right to claim. To excite the displeasure

of applicants for this ordinance by refusing to baptize their children, is indeed no grateful act: but it is a far less evil, than to fall under the frowns of their Supreme Lord, by profaning his holy ordinance in giving it an application which he does not authorize.

Ministers may not administer baptism to those children, whose parents have brought upon them a forfeiture of this privilege: and such parents should reflect, that the exclusion of their infant offspring is occasioned, not by cruelty in ministers, but by their own unchristian behaviour. Willingly would we number these little ones among the members of Christ's church, had not their parents, by their misconduct, made it inconsistent with our duty. But, while they persist in a neglect of Christian institutions and in immoral behaviour, it would ill become our sacred and responsible office to partake of their sins, by giving them the countenance which would result, from a profane application of a holy ordinance to their infants, who have no title to it.

“But shall the innocent child,” it may be asked, “suffer through the fault of its parents?” I answer, *Yes*: such is the will of God. When Ishmael was shut out of his father's covenant, the curse lighted on his children in their successive generations. The Jews have been excommunicated from the church, and their children with them. The same law still governs. Whenever parents incur a forfeiture of their covenant-relation to the Most High, the loss terminates not in themselves, but extends to their infants.

In this particular, the government of God over his church, harmonizes with his government over the world. Under both, the interest of parents and the interest of their children, are most closely united. If a parent squander away his property, his innocent children become impoverished: or if a parent lead an ungodly and impious life, his children will be exposed to the danger of imitating his wicked example, and may, consequently, lose their souls. On the other hand, if a parent, by industrious application to business, acquire a fortune, his children will reap the benefit of his labour: or if a parent lead a virtuous and pious life, his children will enjoy the signal advantage of religious instructions enforced by a good example, and be thus placed in circumstances the most propitious to their eternal salvation. Such is the state of things, under God's general government over mankind; and the state of things, established by his government over the church, is similar. The right of children to baptism stands or falls with the covenant-interest of their parents.

This being the order which God has been pleased to establish in his own house, it were presumptuous in his ministering servants to violate it, by giving the covenant-seal to infants not entitled to it. The order is wise and good. A conscientious regard to it will maintain such a salutary discipline in the church, as will enlist the natural affection of parents on the side of duty; and tend to impress delinquents

with a conviction, that the interest of their infant offspring concurs with their own welfare, in demanding from them a return to the path of duty. And it ought to be recollected, that administering baptism, through mistaken compassion, to infants not having just claims to it, is not only contrary to the divine will, but real cruelty to others; because it lays aside that discipline which God has appointed for the benefit of his church, and is calculated to weaken the obligations which this ordinance imposes on parents to instruct their children, and set before them a Christian example.

The views and motives of parents in presenting their children for baptism, should correspond with the nature and design of this ordinance. Many, it is to be feared, have no correct views of their duty, and are influenced by very improper motives: some designing only to comply with the custom prevailing in the country or place in which they live; others being actuated by a superstitious dread, that, if their children were to die without baptism, they would be lost; and others imagining the grace of regeneration conveyed by this ordinance to its recipients, and of course their children made by it renewed Christians. These motives, founded in error and in ignorance, should have no influence. The first overlooks the authority of Jehovah, while it offers homage to the opinions and practices of men. The second lays undue stress on this rite: for, al-

though parents should endeavour to present their children for baptism at an early day, yet the idea of a child's salvation depending on the application of water to it, should be entertained by none: "Baptism doth save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the *answer of a good conscience towards God,*) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." The last supposes, between the ordinance and the thing signified by it, a connexion which God has not established. The former may be, and often is, used as a channel for conveying the latter: but still there is no certain connexion between the reception of baptism and the bestowment of grace. Simon Magus, shortly after having been baptized by Philip the evangelist, was thus addressed by the apostle Peter: "*I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.* Acts viii. 23.

The true and proper motive that should induce you, my brethren, to apply for the baptism of your children, is *obedience* to the divine will. Jehovah demands from you the dedication of those little ones which he hath given, to himself in this holy ordinance. He instituted baptism as a part of his worship; that, by performing it, we might acknowledge him, as Head of the church, to have a sovereign right to prescribe the forms of his own worship. Your motive, then, in complying with this rite, should correspond with its nature and design: you should approach it, under a deep sense of the high authority by which it was instituted. A regard to

the authority of its institutor, exalts the baptism of your children into an act of acceptable worship: but the same act, performed with a different motive, sinks into mere will-worship.

The reception of this ordinance should be accompanied with an unfeigned dedication of your children to God. To afford you an opportunity of doing this reasonable act, in a manner interesting, solemn, and impressive, baptism was instituted. The language, therefore, of your heart in drawing nigh to Jehovah in his holy ordinance, should be as follows: Creator, God of my life and the life of my child, thou God of mercy in Christ, our Redeemer, in obedience to thy sovereign will, I come to make a solemn surrender of my child to thee, from whom I have received him. Influenced by thy grace, I cheerfully and joyfully dedicate him to thy service and glory, in this holy ordinance appointed for the purpose: and henceforth I would look upon him as thy property, and feel myself under renewed and augmented obligations to train him up in thy nurture and admonition, that he may consider himself as thy devoted servant, and act worthy of that honourable relation which he sustains to thee and to thy church. This sacred rite, I receive as a token of his dedication, and of my engagements to educate him according to the true import of the solemn transaction.

Moreover: In receiving this ordinance, you should endeavour to exercise faith in that great pro-

mise which it seals. The original promise made to Abraham and to his seed, is directed to Christian parents; and baptism is the new instituted token of it. It must, therefore, be the duty of parents to give honour to God's faithfulness, by believing this gracious promise when they receive its confirming sign.

You are not required to believe, that your children will certainly become partakers of the saving blessings of the covenant; for the promise does not insure the salvation of all the seed to which it is exhibited. But it is your duty to believe, that the blessings of life and salvation will certainly descend, from one generation to another, in that visible society, the church, to which all baptized persons belong; and, therefore, inasmuch as your children are members of this society, you should cherish a hope of their becoming sharers in these saving blessings, and being selected, by its Sovereign Head, as heirs of heavenly glory.

In language like the following, should you breathe out the desires of your hearts: I bless thee, O heavenly Father, and God of all grace, for thy merciful promise to be my God, and the God of my seed: and now, believing this glorious promise, I receive for my child that sacred rite which is intended to certify his covenant-relation to thy Supreme Majesty. How great an honour for him to be called *thine*, though by an external relation! How great his privilege, in having it certified to him by bap-

tism, that thou art ready, in the appointed and revealed way, through faith in thy Son, our Redeemer, to admit him to a spiritual and invisible relation to thyself, and to become his God in the fullest and noblest sense of thy promise! Hence, I would draw encouragement to hope, that my child will by grace be advanced to this intimate union with his God; and that membership in thy visible church, will prove the happy means of introducing him into that invisible and holy society, the members of which share in all the saving blessings of thy grace. As thou, O most merciful God, hast been pleased to make him thine in covenant; so be pleased to make him thine, by imparting to him its grace, life, and salvation. Let him be of that happy number, who imitate the faith of Abraham, thy friend, and rejoice with them in being made partakers of the promise in its most glorious extent. Believing thy promise, I look upon my child as a sealed candidate for heavenly glory: and most fervently do I beseech thee not to suffer him to fail of receiving grace, nor to lose, by unbelief, the inestimable prize set before him.

Never should you forget, Christian parents, that the baptism of your children lays you under solemn obligations to train them up in such a religious manner, as may, by God's blessing, bring them to the enjoyment of the saving benefits of the covenant. The language of Jehovah in the ordinance, is, *This is my child; take him and educate him for me, that, when grown up, he may love and delight in my ser-*

vice. Your first care, then, should be to instruct your children in the knowledge of God, and to bring them to an acquaintance with the doctrines, precepts, and promises of our holy religion. This important business of instruction, should be begun very early, and continued as long as your children remain under your government: and that it may be done effectually, you should teach them personally, as well as employ the assistance of others. Put the bible and other religious books into their hands, and lead them to the house of God, that they may hear his holy word expounded and enforced. Teach them early their native depravity, and their absolute need of a Saviour. Talk to them about the divine person and mediatorial character, the wonderful work and gracious offices of Jesus Christ. Explain to them the nature of repentance, faith, and regeneration; and, while you press on them the necessity of these graces, fail not to inform them, that they must look to the Holy Spirit for them, who alone can work them in the human heart. Discover to them a future state of rewards and punishments, the happiness of the righteous, and the misery of the wicked. Urge them, by motives addressed both to their hopes and to their fears, to prepare for death and eternity: and to give weight to these motives, labour to impress their minds with a sense of the shortness and uncertainty of life. Teach them their duties, and guard them against temptations and dangers. Let all your instructions

be enforced, by admonishing your children that, being dedicated to God in baptism, they are not their own, but are bound, by covenant-engagements sealed in that ordinance, to live for God. Let them be encouraged to seek divine grace, by explaining to them the nature of Jehovah's gracious covenant, and informing them that baptism certifies his willingness to become their reconciled God, and portion in Christ Jesus. Communicate to them the precious truth, that, while all who hear the gospel have encouragement afforded to hope for success in the diligent use of means appointed for obtaining divine grace, they have more than others; because they are members of the church—of that holy society to which all the promises belong by covenant-grant, confirmed by a visible sign.

Remember, too, parents, that the exercise of a prudent and salutary discipline over your children, is an incumbent duty. Sufficient authority is given to you for this purpose. Be careful, therefore, to admonish, to reprove, to rebuke, and, when necessary, to correct them. To the duty last mentioned, some parents have strong objections: but they ought to recollect that, if through excessive indulgence, or careless indifference, they do not correct their children for misconduct calling for chastisement, they fail in *kindness* to them, as well as in duty to God. To imagine children can, before they obtain the exercise of reason, be governed without correction, is to entertain a notion false in itself, and re-

pugnant to inspired truth. "Foolishness," says the wise man, "is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him. He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes."* The severe calamities brought on Eli's family, for his not restraining the licentious conduct of his sons, by the exercise of that authority with which he, as a magistrate, was clothed; should excite in parents a salutary fear, lest, by a criminal indulgence of their children, and a mistaken tenderness in withholding correction, they should expose both themselves and their children to the mournful consequences of neglected duty.†

Once more: Prayer must accompany all your endeavours to educate your children in religious truth and practice. Depraved in heart and naturally prone to evil, their corrupt propensities, unless subdued by divine grace, will render ineffectual your instruction, discipline and influence: and, therefore, for this grace you ought, fervently and perseveringly, to pray, both in private and with your children.

From the covenant-promise, be it remembered, Christian parents, you may, and should, derive at once a precious encouragement to pray for your children, and a powerful argument to enforce your prayers: an encouragement, because they may be of that happy number to whom God intends to com-

* Prov. xxii. 15. and xiii. 24.

† 1 Sam. iii. 11—14.

municate, saving blessings; and an argument, because he directs you to plead it, and put him in remembrance of his engagements. Arguments drawn from God's own promises, are the strongest and the most effectual that can be urged in prayer. With this truth Moses was well acquainted; and, with holy skill, he pleaded, on sundry occasions, Jehovah's promise, covenant, and oath.* Hence, the great success which attended the prayers of this illustrious saint.

Carry, then, my brethren, your dear offspring in the arms of faith, to a throne of grace, and beseech the Lord *your* God to remember his covenant, and graciously fulfil to them his great promise, by imparting to them saving benefits. Beseech him, by his covenant-engagements with the church, to admit them to an intimate and spiritual union with his divine Majesty; that, in the highest sense of the relation, he may be their God, and they, his sons and daughters.

Finally: It is an incumbent duty to set before your children a pious example. Mere instruction is not sufficient. To render it effectual and truly profitable, it must be enforced by consistent personal practice. You must live religion before your children, as well as teach it; and thus convince them you really believe the doctrines, and feel bound to observe the precepts, which you inculcate. A

* Exod. xxxii. 11—14. and xxxiii. 12—17.

pious example will give authority to your instructions. It will impress the truth on your children's minds, powerfully, though imperceptibly. It will soften hearts, which instruction cannot penetrate. It will also explain the truth, and make it intelligible to the dullest comprehension. Let your children see religion living and reigning in your temper and conduct, and they will gain such a view of its nature and tendency as words can never impart.

These, Christian parents, are the duties which the baptism of your children imposes. Perform them with fidelity, diligence, and perseverance; and then you may look forward with encouraging hopes to the future conversion and salvation of your dear offspring. It is a maxim, written with the pen of inspiration: "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old he will not depart from it."* The great design of Jehovah's covenant is expressed in these cheering words: "I will establish my covenant between me and thee—to be a God unto thee, and to thy SEED after thee.† These truths, smiling benignantly on children, should give life to parental faithfulness, and inspire with hope, when want of success would lead to despondency. For a long time, your efforts for the conversion of your children may seem fruitless. The charms of this vain, fascinating world, may lead them astray from duty; and, impelled by youthful and intemperate pas-

* Prov. xxii. 6.

† Gen. xvii. 7.

sions, they may run into great excesses of vice: but still you should not despair of their salvation; they may yet be reclaimed. and you enjoy the happiness of hailing them as new-born heirs of eternal glory. Or should their profligacy bring your gray hairs with sorrow to the grave, yet your instructions, for a while apparently lost, may hereafter operate on their hearts, and lead them to repentance and faith, when the lips which now impart them shall have ceased to admonish and entreat. How many pious parents have had the felicity of welcoming to the mansions of eternal blessedness, children of whose salvation they, while on earth, almost despaired! This may be your felicity. Seed sown by the hand of diligence, watered by tears of parental affection, and cherished by the prayers of faith, is not likely to be lost. For a time it may lie buried in dust; but at length it may vegetate and bring forth abundant fruit.

LETTER XVII.

An Address to Baptized Youth.

MY YOUNG FRIENDS,

PERMIT me affectionately to direct your attention to those important duties, resulting from your baptism in infancy, the fulfilment of which should now engage your most diligent endeavours. When your parents presented you in this ordinance, you were, it is true, entirely passive in the transaction, and unconscious of the meaning of it. But do not, on this account, imagine the act of dedication to be a nullity. No: it is binding; it is recorded in heaven: and all the reluctance of a rebellious spirit cannot annul the obligation; nor can the sophistry of error prove it to be of no force. You were, be it remembered, the property of Jehovah antecedently to the surrender which your parents made; because from him you had received your being, and all its endowments. Being his property by right of creation, it was perfectly just in him to require your parents to acknowledge this fact by a significant ceremony: and the recognition of it in baptism was a reasonable service, which they could not refuse without rebellious ingratitude. To dedicate you to God, they were in duty bound: and, had they not

done it. you deceive yourselves, if you imagine you would have been left at liberty to act as you please. Far from it: every human being, baptized or not, is subject to that holy law which demands perfect and unsinning obedience, under penalty of eternal death. You have, then, no ground to complain of the conduct of your parents in this act; and we hope you will never allow such a thought to enter your minds: for they have done you no injury in giving you up to your rightful Lord and Master, whose unlimited propriety in you can never be impaired. The moment you received existence, you were his; and as long as you shall retain your being, you will be his.

Complain of being baptized! of an invaluable privilege! Complain of being planted in the nursery of heaven! of being entered into that school of Christ, in which the pupils are trained up for the employments and pleasures of the heavenly state; where they are taught a divine philosophy, consisting in the knowledge of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ; the mystery of redemption, and the way to glory; the science that makes man wise unto salvation! Complain of being united to that visible society, separated from the world, by Jehovah's covenant; a society which he has enriched by inestimable promises, and visits with his saving grace; and in which he seeks and finds the heirs of his heavenly kingdom! Complain! Your hearts should overflow with gratitude to God for granting you the great privilege of infant baptism. Thankful you certainly

will be, if ever you receive his converting grace. You will bless his holy name, for requiring your parents to dedicate you to his service. You will look back with pleasure to that hour, when, by the washing of water, you were sealed as Jehovah's property: and you will regret that any time since has been spent, in a way inconsistent with the import and obligation of your baptismal dedication to Almighty God.

The duties, my young friends, imposed on you by baptism, are threefold: they relate to your parents, to the church, and to God.

1. Baptism imposes on you duties with respect to your parents. These duties correspond with those which your parents owe to you. Are they bound, by baptismal engagements, to instruct you in religion? Then you must be bound to receive their instructions, with a teachable disposition. Never turn away your ears from them; but, at all times, listen attentively to their words. Study those excellent summaries of divine truth, our shorter and longer catechisms. Read the holy scriptures daily. You are pupils in the school of Christ; and, being favoured with so divine a teacher, it is surely incumbent on you to receive that heavenly knowledge which he imparts. The acquisition of this knowledge is, not only highly important, but absolutely necessary to your salvation. You should, therefore, be anxious to obtain it, and carefully improve, for

the purpose, all the means with which you are favoured. "This is life eternal," said our Redeemer, "that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." Such being the inestimable value of the prize set before you, how vigorous should be your endeavours to secure it! How diligently should you learn the doctrines and precepts of our divine religion, that you may know how to live for God, and find the way to his heavenly kingdom! Here let me remind you of a truth which ought never to be forgotten, that without the teaching of the Holy Spirit, you cannot gain a spiritual, experimental, and saving acquaintance with the sacred scriptures. Most earnestly, therefore, implore his gracious aid and divine illumination; and, whenever you open your bible, or other religious book, offer up David's devout ejaculation: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law."

Is it the duty of your parents to maintain order and exercise discipline in their families? Then it must be your duty to conform to their established rules, to submit to their restraints, and to profit by their reproofs.

Are your parents bound to set before you a pious example? Then you must be bound to copy after their piety. Do they fulfil this part of their baptismal engagements? Bless God for giving you such valuable parents; and let it be your prayer to be enabled to profit by this signal advantage, and to

imitate their Christian deportment. But if they prove delinquent, and set you a bad, instead of a good, example, you may not imitate their wickedness. You are to follow them, only when, and as far as, they follow your heavenly Father. In circumstances so unfavourable, you should cry the more earnestly to God for his gracious assistance, to enable you to do your duty, and set an example of piety before your unhappy parents.

2. Baptism imposes on you duties with respect to the church. You are her children. As an affectionate and faithful mother, she is bound to treat you, by instructing, watching over, and subjecting you to suitable discipline when you go astray from the path of duty: and, consequently, you are bound to conduct yourselves as her sons and daughters, by revering her authority, attending upon and profiting by the instructions which she provides for you, submitting to her discipline, and conducting yourselves in such a pious manner, as to reflect honour upon her holy character.

The interest of the church, my young friends, should lie very near to your hearts: and, by every means in your power, you should be ready to promote her welfare. It is the duty of members of human societies to desire, and to advance their prosperity: and surely it must be the duty of members of God's church to display an active zeal for her prosperity: a society, in its design and effects, unspeakably more important than any society ever in-

stituted by the wisdom of man. Let, then, the welfare of Zion engage your earnest solicitude. Carefully endeavour to qualify yourselves for managing her concerns, in your several stations: and, on all occasions, be ready to contribute by your prayers, your counsels, your pecuniary aid, to maintain her influence, to extend her limits, and to exalt her glory. This is that heaven-born society, instituted by infinite wisdom for the salvation of God's chosen; at the head of which reigns his own Son, to which angels are ministering servants, and which shall survive the wreck of states, nations, and empires. To be made instrumental in advancing the prosperity of this glorious society, is an honour worthy the ambition of any mortal, however illustrious by birth, or dignified by title, or elevated in his station. Baptized as members of the church, it is your duty, remember it, my young friends, to qualify yourselves for filling the places now occupied by your parents, when they shall be gathered to their fathers in the dust. The zeal which ancient saints discovered for the interest of the church, should certainly be imitated by her members living under the new and better dispensation. "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper who love thee. Thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof. If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem

above my chief joy." Such is the spirit which should animate every member of the church of our exalted Redeemer.

Finally: Baptism imposes on you duties which respect God. It binds you to ratify the dedication of yourselves to his service and glory,—to accept the grace of his promise,—and to lead a holy and unblamable life.

Baptism lays you under obligations to ratify the dedication of yourselves to God. His you are; and he claims you as such. Justice, gratitude, and self-interest unite in requiring you to recognise his propriety in you, and unlimited dominion over you, by some personal and explicit act. This you cannot refuse to do without contracting aggravated guilt: for he has bound you to his service by peculiar ties, and favoured you with very distinguishing religious advantages, by placing you under the care of his church, and imposing on your parents solemn obligations to attend carefully to your Christian education; ties which cannot be broken through, and advantages which cannot be abused, without incurring the guilt of much presumption, and great ingratitude. We, therefore, remind you of your duty, and press you to perform it. All are bound to love and serve the Lord their Creator: but you are under peculiar obligations. To live without God in the world, is in any rebellion against lawful authority: but in you it is an aggravated kind of rebellion; rebellion against the authority of Jehovah, who has

favoured you with such special privileges, and numbered you among the people whom he has separated from the world for his own worship and glory. And will you act a part disgraceful to this holy society? Will you endeavour, as far as depends on your conduct, to frustrate God's design in forming his church? Will you live in such conformity to this world, that there shall be no perceptible difference between you and unbaptized youth? Will you extort, from the lips of unbelief, a question reproachful to our Redeemer's ordinance?—What profit is there in baptism? God forbid.

Remember, baptized youth, that you are not your own, and whose you are. Be sensible of the obligations arising from baptismal dedication to Jehovah, and fulfil them. Seal the dedication of yourselves to your covenant-God by a personal act,—by a believing and holy participation of that Christian ordinance specially instituted for this purpose. Take the consecrated symbols of our Lord's broken body, and shed blood; and thus, by an appointed seal, ratify your covenant-relation to the Most High. In the presence of the church, and before the world, make it known, that you esteem it a high privilege to have been devoted to him in baptism, and that, by his grace, you are determined to be his true and faithful servants, his holy and obedient children.

Another duty, arising out of your baptism, which you owe to God, is, to accept the grace of his promise. Baptism, as stated in the preceding

letters, is a seal of Jehovah's covenant, certifying every recipient that, according to its tenor, he is willing to be reconciled to him through Jesus Christ, and to be his God in the noblest sense of his promise. The same invaluable offer is made to every one who hears the gospel: but it is your peculiar happiness to receive this all-gracious offer in a promise of that covenant which has been sealed to you by a visible sign. Already has Jehovah taken you into a special external relation to himself, and condescended to style himself your God: and he now invites and presses you to receive his proffered grace, presented in a way calculated to destroy every doubt with respect to his sincerity, that he may be your God, in a nobler sense, by dwelling in you, and you in him. It must, then, be your duty, as it certainly is your inestimable privilege, cordially and thankfully to accept this all-gracious offer; an offer which you cannot refuse without contracting the guilt of most offensive disobedience to the divine will, signified in a manner the most condescending and persuasive, nor without sacrificing your own best and eternal interests.

Be not, my young friends, contented with that external relation to God which you sustain, and with wearing the signature of his property. To imagine that baptism and its attending privileges will save you, would be to indulge a hope the most deceptive and ruinous. "Circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law; but if thou be a breaker

of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision." The Jews, ignorant of the nature of true religion, boasted of being descended from Abraham, and of wearing in their flesh the mark of God's covenant-people; and concluded, that the special privileges bestowed on them secured to them divine favour and future happiness. A fatal mistake! for privileges, not improved, but abused, instead of procuring safety, increase guilt, and occasion ruin. This prevalent error, John, our Redeemer's forerunner, exposed; and warned his countrymen of its destructive consequences. "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees; therefore, every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire." Unbelief brought upon the Jews the displeasure of Almighty God; it was the cause of their excommunication from his church: and the tremendous judgments of heaven upon this unhappy people, formerly so highly favoured, proclaim to the world how criminal and dangerous it is to misimprove distinguishing religious privileges.

This Jewish error, it is to be feared, is adopted by many nominal Christians. They rely on their descent from pious parents, their infant baptism, and their connexion with the church, as a security against deserved punishment; although their con-

duct is unworthy of the name by which they are called, and inconsistent with the obligations imposed on them by their baptism. Vain refuge! They sin against superior light, and special advantages for religious improvement: and shall augmented guilt plead for their pardon and salvation? Your external privileges, baptized youth, will, unless you repent, afford you no shelter from the wrath of Almighty God: and, in the day of judgment, you will find your descent from pious parents and your infant baptism serve no other purpose, than to make his indignation wax hotter against you.

Would you stand with boldness before his awful tribunal? You must rest your hopes on a better foundation than external privileges; you must be washed in the laver of regeneration, and be clothed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." The essence of religion consists, not in outward ceremonies or forms, but in those inward graces which are wrought in the soul by the Spirit of God. Hence, the apostles declares this important truth, worthy of your most serious consideration: "In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."

With affectionate desires for your salvation, I beseech you not to rest in any external privileges, but to seek the enjoyment of the saving blessings of the covenant. Let the honourable relation which

you sustain to Jehovah, be the means of leading you to that near spiritual union to him, which will make him your God in the highest sense of his promise. What a dreadful misfortune would it be, if, after having been in covenant with him, you should be finally rejected by him! if, after having enjoyed the honour of being called the children of his kingdom, you should be excluded from the kingdom of heaven! if, after having had sealed offers of salvation, you should fall under the sentence of everlasting damnation! From the depths of hell, you would then look back to this world, with inexpressible anguish: and the recollection of the state so favourable to your salvation in which you are now placed, and the repeated offers of mercy now made to you, would be in you a worm that never dies, and a fire which is never quenched.

This the scriptures assure us will be the terrible condition of sinners who abuse their covenant-privileges, and finally perish. Believing the testimony of God in his word, it would be unfaithfulness to him and cruel tenderness to you, were we not to set the danger before your eyes, and urge you to flee from it. “Knowing, therefore, the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men.” By the coming of the Son of God to judge the world,—by the unavailing cries of those who shall then be found unprepared to meet him,—by the awful solemnities of the final day,—and by the eternal miseries of the wicked, we affectionately beseech you to seek the saving grace

of God, that you may stand with acceptance before his august tribunal.

Having pointed out your danger, we would allure and captivate your hearts, by exhibiting the rich and everlasting mercies of God contained in his covenant. The design of the covenant is thus expressed: "To be a God unto thee, and to thy seed! What a glorious promise! Did you ever weigh its meaning? Did you ever reflect what it is to have Jehovah for your God in the sublimest sense of his promise? In this relation are comprehended heaven and all its glories. The treasure is so immense, that an angel from paradise could not tell you its value: the blessings are so vast, that eternity alone can display them. And who can make light of such a promise? Can you refuse blessings which, as sinful and immortal beings, you so much need? the pardon of all your sins, the renovation of your nature, the justification of your persons, adoption into the family of the Most High, a title to a heavenly inheritance? Can you refuse blessings, which, being accepted, will heighten the enjoyments, as well as sweeten the bitterness of life,—soften the bed of death,—shed the light of hope upon your tomb,—open to you the gates of paradise,—and last while your being lasts?

Reflect, my young friends, on the inestimable value of this sealed promise; and let not the perishing vanities of the world induce you to slight and reject the infinitely condescending offers of your co-

venant God. With a tender solicitude for your salvation, he presses you to accept them. O turn not away from his mercy, which waits patiently on you, and seems unwilling to give up to perdition. Profit by that signal privilege, your infant baptism. Accept the grace which it seals. Lay hold, by faith, on the grand covenant-promise, that Jehovah may be indeed your God, and you his spiritual children.

Finally: Baptism, my young friends, imposes on you the duty of leading a holy and an unblamable life. The grand, comprehensive injunction of the covenant is, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." You are solemnly bound to live as Jehovah's peculiar people; and, by yielding a sincere, humble, universal, constant, and growing obedience to his commandments, to testify your gratitude for his marvellous and distinguishing kindness. It is indeed a truth never to be forgotten, that the blessings of salvation are freely offered, and freely to be accepted. Let not, however, the imagination enter your minds, that the freeness of divine grace releases us from obligations to obey our Creator's will. Our obligation to punishment, and our obligation to keep the law with a view to merit eternal life, it does indeed cancel: but the requirements of the law, as a rule of life, it diminishes in no degree; and, instead of exempting us from them, it increases our obligations to obedience. While, therefore, you receive, with a thankful heart, the free grace of God, yield, as a tribute of honor due to his Majesty from

all his creatures, and as a testimony of gratitude justly demanded by him from redeemed sinners, sincere and growing obedience to his good and righteous commandments. Remember that it is written, “Without *holiness* no man shall see the Lord.”

Often recall to mind the obligations resulting from baptism, the seal of Jehovah's covenant. Endeavour to awaken those active principles of obedience, gratitude and love, by meditating in a strain like the following: How interesting that transaction, when my parents dedicated me an infant to their God and my God! Then the Most High condescended to take notice of me, by nature “a child of wrath.” Then he admitted me as a member of his visible church, numbered me as one of his family, and sealed me as his peculiar property. He has made to me a tender of all saving blessings: and, by baptism, he has, from my earliest days, certified me of his readiness to become my God in the fullest and noblest sense of his promise. Amazing condescension of the King of Glory to a worm of the dust! Wonderful grace of a holy and just God to an apostate rebel! What fervent love, what lively gratitude to him, should reign in my heart! What shall I render unto the Lord for his marvellous kindness? Will he deign to accept the poor, defective returns of love and obedience, which, by his grace, I may be enabled to make? Then let me renounce every false way, and endeavour to walk in all his commandments and ordinances blamelessly.

Be it my great business to do his will, and approve myself in his sight.

But, before I finish this address, let me remind you, my young friends, that new obedience implies a new heart. 'The heart is the fountain of action. Actions are, in the sight of God, good or bad, according to the intention or principle from which they proceed. Man looks on the outward appearance; and if this be fair, he will approve of your character: but God, remember, looks on the heart, and demands truth, integrity in the inward parts. Love to your Creator is the great principle of obedience on which his law insists. This wanting, your life, how usefully and honourably soever it may be spent, will not be acceptable to God. And this great, necessary principle is wanting in every unrenewed person. "The carnal mind is enmity against God.—They that are in the flesh cannot please God."*

Your first duty, then, is to endeavour to obtain a new heart, as the necessary principle of evangelical obedience. Enslaved by sin, you certainly are unable to renew your own heart, and create love where enmity has hitherto existed. But never indulge the imagination, that this inability can discharge you from obligation to perform a most important and essential duty: because this inability was induced by man's wilful apostasy from God, and is itself the great sin of our race, and the parent of

* Rom. viii. 7, 8.

all other sins. This lamentable truth, that you are unable, owing to deep depravity of nature, to create in yourselves a new heart, you should duly realize, confess, and bewail. But let not a sense of native weakness discourage you in seeking this great and necessary change: for God, in boundless mercy, has promised to bestow it on sinners, and is daily fulfilling his promise. While, therefore, you acknowledge your duty, and confess your inability to perform it, as your *crime*, seek from God, in the use of appointed means, the renewing and sanctifying influences of his Holy Spirit. Plead the covenant-promise on this subject,* and intreat the Lord to fulfil it to you. Plead with all the importunity of perishing sinners for a new heart, and a new spirit:—for grace to walk worthy of your high vocation, and to fulfil the duties imposed by your infant baptism.

And that God may incline your hearts to keep his commandments, make you comforts to your parents, useful in the world, and ornaments to the church; and that, when, by his grace, you shall have done his will on earth, he may send his holy angels to carry you to the bosom of your father Abraham, and to the blissful society of the sons of God, is the prayer of

Your sincere friend,

And affectionate pastor,

JACOB J. JANEWAY.

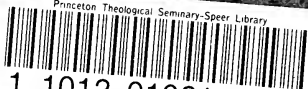
* Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27. Gal. iii. 14.







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