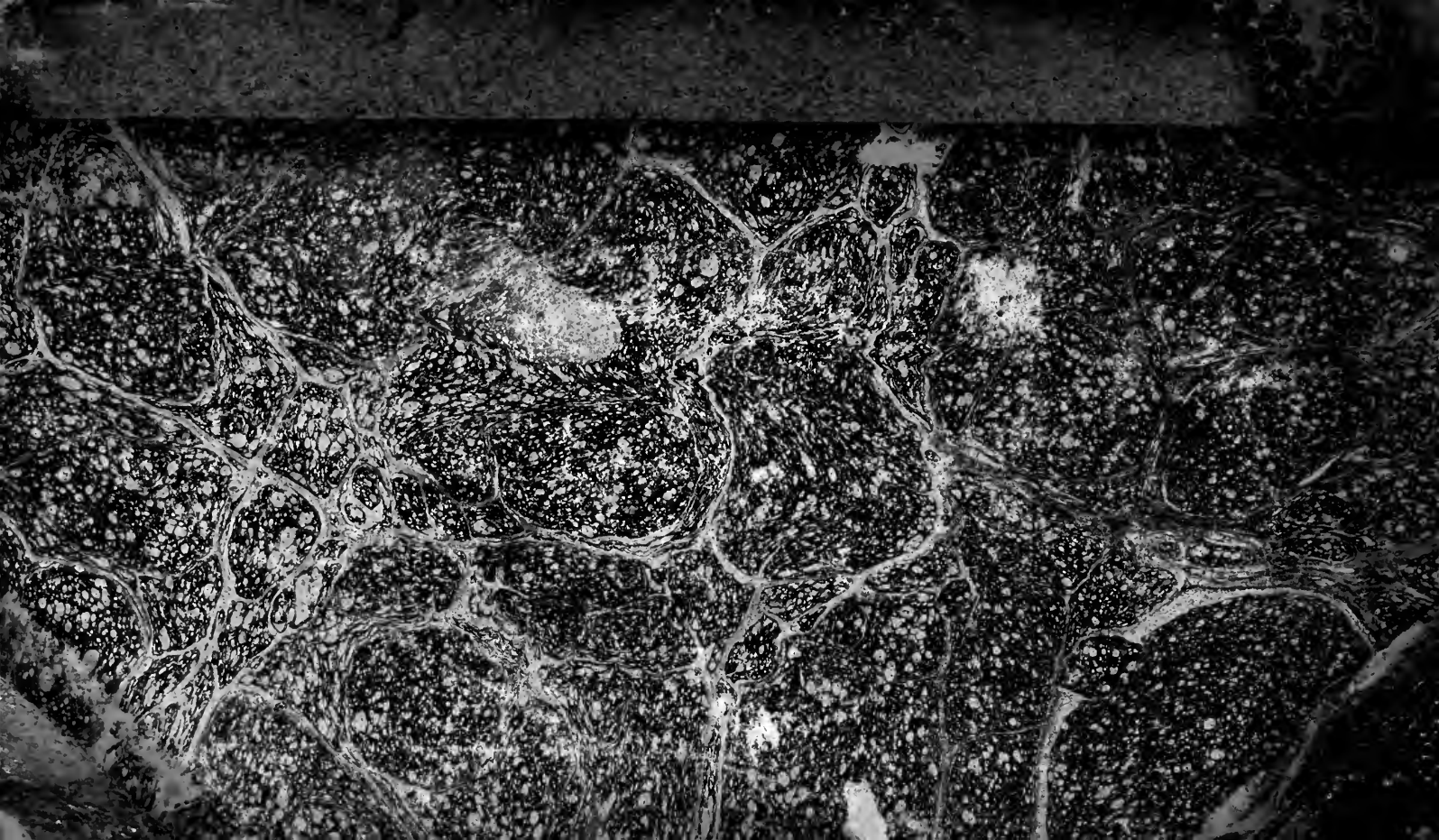

A

Theological Enquiry

INTO THE

SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM,

AND THE

NATURE OF BAPTISMAL REGENERATION:

IN FIVE DISCOURSES,

PREACHED BEFORE

THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE,

IN APRIL, 1817.

BY THE REV. C. BENSON, M.A.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

MY attention was first more particularly directed to the subject of the following Discourses by the request of an individual, whose Baptism had been neglected in infancy, and who, after having grown up to years of maturity and attended the service of the Church, felt dubious with regard to the necessity and advantages of receiving that Sacrament. In the course of the extended and serious enquiry to which this circumstance gave rise, I was naturally led to consider the present controversy upon Regeneration; and, after having formed a mature and

deliberate opinion, I drew up my sentiments in the following form, and delivered them before the University of Cambridge, as one of the Preachers for 1817. The reception which they then met with has induced me to lay them before the public.

I should not have entered upon so immaterial a statement, as the origin of the present publication, had I not been anxious to shew, that I did not sit down to the investigation as the determined advocate of a preconceived opinion, but as an impartial enquirer, and for the purpose of satisfying, if possible, the conscientious scruples of an individual upon the nature and efficacy of Baptism. The result, whether true or false, in which

the enquiry has issued, was unpremeditated; and if I had any prejudices to combat, they certainly would have led to a conclusion considerably different from that which I have ultimately adopted.

To this statement I shall only add, that whatever may be the fate of the following pages, I trust, they will at least be found to be written in a tone of inoffensive moderation. Personal controversy upon any subject, but more especially in sacred things, cannot be too much, or too carefully avoided. Even in reading it, I have often felt my temper irritated and my judgment misled, and I therefore hope, that through life I shall have the virtue to form, and the strength to maintain, a decided resolution

to resist the propensity, and pursue the conduct recommended in the following passage of ~~Cicero~~ Tacitus: "Neminem nominabo, genus hominum signasse contentus."

C. B.

Newcastle-upon-Tyne,
June 10, 1817.

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DISCOURSE I.

THE INSTITUTION AND NATURE OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM.

1 PETER iii. 21.

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.

THERE are many passages in the New Testament which either directly or indirectly apply to the subject of baptism, but that to which, in an investigation into its nature and effects, our attention ought in the first instance more especially to be directed, is the original institution of the ordinance itself, as it stands recorded in the three last verses of the Gospel of St. Matthew. "Jesus came and spake to the Apostles, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptising 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. And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

From this passage a variety of inferences may be drawn, which are of peculiar importance in the consideration of the sacrament. The first is, that baptism, so far as it is an ordinance of the Christian Church, was established by Jesus himself. The second is, that it was established by Jesus, as a perpetual and universal institution in his Church; and the third, that it was established by him as an institution perpetually and universally efficacious for the production of the end it has in view.

The first of these inferences is so undeniably obvious, that, except from its connection with the other two, it might seem almost unnecessary to be mentioned. It was *Jesus* who came. It was Jesus who spake to them. It was Jesus who commanded them to go forth and baptise all nations, and it is *Jesus*, therefore, who is the author and the institutor of the rite.

It is also sufficiently evident that, though Jesus addressed these words to the eleven Apostles alone, he did not address them in their private character as men, but in their professional character, as the appointed ministers of religion, as persons peculiarly selected and sent forth to convert every creature to the belief, and instruct

every converted creature in the principles of the Gospel. And from the promise which he immediately added, " Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world;" it is equally plain that he did not only address them as individual ministers, but also in their collective capacity, as the representatives of all the future ministers of the Gospel. For if that were not the case, the promise itself would be made of none effect, ridiculous in its terms and impossible in its accomplishment. The ministers of the Gospel, therefore, in every age are not only permitted and authorized, but positively and distinctly commanded by the imperative form of the expressions, to practice the rite universally, and continue it for ever; to make disciples out of every nation under heaven, and as a means of making them disciples, to baptise them in the form prescribed.

Now whatever is done by any servant at the command, and with the authority of his master, may be said to be virtually done by the master himself, and so far as the form and the commission of the master extend, will in all cases be efficacious to the end proposed. Those Christians, therefore, in every age, who have been duly and rightly baptised, may be considered to have been, in fact, baptised by Jesus himself, through the hands of his ministers, and all the legitimate effects of the administration of the ordinance to

have descended with full force upon their heads and hearts. It is the same now as it was in the original promulgation of the Gospel, and Jesus may now also, as then he said, "to baptise many disciples, though Jesus himself baptise not," but only his ministers. If then we examine the terms of the commission which was given to the Apostles, we shall find that it delegated to them an authority of the most unlimited and unsuspicious nature. Lo, *I* am with you, says our Saviour, I, to whom all power is given in heaven and in earth, I am present with you alway in the fulness of that power, even unto the end of the world. It is I, to whom Angels and principalities and dominions are made subject; who am over all, and above you all, and in you all; it is I who have commanded you to go forth and baptise in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. And if you believe my promise, and obey my commandment, wherever you are, and in every age, I will be with you, to strengthen your weakness and confirm the deed. After this positive and solemn declaration, it were surely something more than a weakness of faith in the words, something more than a want of reverence for the character of Jesus, to doubt the energetic and effectual operation of the ministerial work of baptism, or to deny in any case the universal efficacy of its legitimate administration.

In what then does the efficacy of baptism consist, and what are those privileges and benefits, which, under different circumstances, it may be supposed to confer?

This is a question of primary importance, and in endeavouring to frame a satisfactory answer, and to decide upon the nature of those effects which are produced in the various recipients of baptism, we must carefully guard against the double error of raising its advantages too high, or unwarily depressing them below the level of the truth.

Now it is not for a moment to be supposed, that our Lord would solemnly and seriously establish any custom as perpetual and universal in his Church, without some sound and solid object in view. But the precise extent and value of that object can only be determined by an accurate examination of the intention with which the custom in question was originally ordained. Into this examination, therefore, we must now proceed, with regard to the sacrament of baptism; and in entering upon this enquiry, it will plainly appear from the very words of the institution, that baptism was ordained by Jesus with a religious view, and that it was intended by him that all who were initiated into the religion of the Gospel in any part or period of the world, should be initiated by the performance of this rite. "Go ye, there-

fore, and *make disciples* of all nations, *baptising* them." All therefore are by baptism to be made Christians, Christians not in outward name and appearance only, not merely by a nominal assumption of Christianity before men, but in truth and in reality, and before God. It has been the opinion of many, indeed, that baptism is nothing more than an acknowledgment on our part before the Church, that we have taken upon ourselves the name and profession of Christians. But the inadequacy of this view of the subject may be satisfactorily proved by a reference to the circumstances which attended the baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch. *He* was not baptised before any assembly of Christians. He was baptised in a place and at a time when Philip and himself would appear to have been the only witnesses to the transaction. And from hence we may fairly conclude, that baptism is something more than a bare outward profession of our faith to the Church, because in that light the baptism of the Eunuch could have been of no avail. It was not publicly, or before the Church, that he was baptised. The only persons present were probably himself and the Minister of Jesus. The *general* efficacy of baptism we would therefore resolve into the new relations into which the recipient is introduced with his Creator, his Redeemer, and his Sanctifier. It is an acknowledgment on God's part, that he

has admitted us into the religion and fellowship of his Son. "For by one spirit we are all baptised into one body," and adopting the words of the venerable Hooker, we would say that "baptism not only declareth but maketh us Christians;" in the words of Taylor, that "the spirit of God moves upon the waters of baptism, and in that sacrament adopts us into the mystical body of Christ;" and that by the right and legal administration of the ordinance, we are all immediately and actually placed under the operation of the law, and admitted into the conditions of the covenant of the Gospel. No matter whether he be faithful or faithless, righteous or wicked, to no man is baptism an empty and an insignificant sign. It is to the hypocrite as to the sincere, a sign and a means of placing them under the operation of the law, and bringing them within the influence of the covenant of grace.

Whilst we thus state it as an unrestricted proposition, that the efficacy of baptism consists in placing *all* who receive it under the Gospel covenant, we are fully aware that we may seem to many to advance a doctrine, which inevitably tends to encourage a destructive confidence in the mere *opus operatum*, and an unfounded reliance upon the bare ceremonial administration of the sacrament. To guard, therefore, against this misapprehension, and to remove this prejudice, we

shall observe, in the first place, that the consequences which flow from being placed under the influence of any covenant, vary with the varying nature of that covenant; and then proceed to enquire into the nature of that variation, under different circumstances.

We may be allowed, perhaps, to determine generally with regard to covenants, that they are agreements, in which the mutual consent of the contracting parties is either expressed or implied; that they may be formed either between equals or unequals; that they may be formed for almost any purpose whatever, either for the purpose of conferring or receiving a favour, either for the purpose of creating a new, or strengthening an already existing obligation; that they may be either conditional or unconditional in their terms; and that, after they have once been formed, they will be effectual to realize the end they propose, in every case and in every instance, in which the contracting parties oppose no bar or obstacle to their operation. If this view of the nature and object of a covenant be kept constantly in mind, it will be easy, under every modification, to determine what will be a bar to a participation in its benefits. If a covenant be absolute and unconditional in its construction, the benefits which it promises will of course be universally conveyed and conferred upon every one who is admitted

within its operation, whether they be good or bad. Where a covenant is *without* conditions, it will be but one and the same thing to be placed under its influence, and made a partaker of its blessings, because the efficacy of the covenant being in this case altogether independent of the circumstances of the covenanters, can neither be hindered or advanced by any change in those circumstances. But where a covenant requires qualifications as well as bestows privileges, the case assumes a complexion altogether different, and the effect will correspond and vary according to the presence or the absence of those qualifications. When the advantages of a covenant are *conditionally* bestowed by a superior upon an inferior being, the want of those conditions in the inferior being, must generally be a bar of the most inseparable kind, a want necessarily destructive of the beneficial operation of the covenant, and permanently fatal to the object it has in view.

We have only therefore to enquire what is the precise nature of the Gospel covenant, and we shall immediately be enabled to perceive what will be the effect of our admission into it by baptism.

The Gospel then is the free gift of an offended Creator to his offending creatures. It is a covenant of grace, conveying blessings from a superior to an inferior being. A covenant it is

between the judge and the criminal,—a righteous God and sinful man. And whilst the revelation of this covenant from God is a decided and irresistible proof of his consent to its terms, the concurrence of man, though not so expressly given, is yet unequivocally implied, in his natural obligation as a creature, to agree to any thing which may be proposed to him by his Creator. The Gospel, therefore, as might naturally be expected, considering the object it has in view, and the source of wisdom from which it springs, teaches us every thing relative to the forgiveness of our sins, which it is either necessary or useful that we should know. It describes the method by which, after having fallen from the favour of God by transgression, and lost our title to the inheritance of everlasting happiness, we may again be restored to that favour, and continue in it to the end of our lives, and then pass through the gates of death into the temple of that eternal bliss which we had forfeited.

What then is it for a sinner to be restored to the favour of God, and how is it to be effected?

The pardon of sins that are already past, is of course the first thing implied in our restoration to the favour of an offended Creator. "For the wrath of God is against all ungodliness," and that wrath cannot be removed, nor his good-will

recovered, until the guilt of our sins have been blotted out. Then, and then only, if we continue steadfast and unmoveable in the ways of God, we may look upon him as our Father and our friend. The *remission of sins* is therefore the first of the promises of the Gospel. But as the same weakness, which before led us into crime, will still operate upon our conduct, if not happily prevented by some superior and controlling influence, we cannot evidently continue in holiness, and consequently not in the favour of God, unless he give us strength to resist our temptations, and overcome our frailty for the future. Now this strength the Scriptures uniformly attribute to the working of the Spirit of God. "It is God that worketh in us both to will and to do." For our continuance in the favour of God, when once restored, there is therefore further added in the Gospel to the pardon of sin, the *power of the Spirit* to perform our duty.

Such are the blessings contained in the covenant of the Gospel; but it would be a vain and foolish imagination to suppose that they are absolutely and unconditionally bestowed. Of God, the author of the covenant, it would indeed be impious to speak, as if any thing more were required of him than the simple word of revelation which he has given. But it would be equally impious to suppose, that the glory, the justice, and the righ-

teousness of Heaven would grant its mighty mercies indifferently to the pure and to the impure, to the filthy and the clean. From man, therefore, the inferior party in the contract, conditions and qualities *are* required, conditions upon which alone he will be permitted to become an heir in possession of the promises of the Gospel, and qualities by which alone he will be enabled to enjoy them. And these qualities and conditions are expressly stated by our Saviour to be, 1st. an earnest and true repentance for all our follies and crimes, which necessarily includes a solemn resolution and unfeigned endeavour to avoid all such crimes and follies for the future, and to pursue the paths of well-doing, without wavering and weariness. For, "except ye repent, ye shall all perish." 2ndly. a sincere belief in God and in Jesus Christ, whom he has sent. For "whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life."

These are the two fixed and indispensable conditions, without which no *capable* member of the Gospel covenant will ever be permitted to partake in the blessings it has promised. But this loss of glory is not the whole of the evil arising from the culpable absence of those conditions. To her peculiar mercies the Gospel adds her awful judgments also, and justly prepares for the unbelieving and impenitent, for those who are

deficient in those qualifications which *she* requires and *they* have the power to attain, the worm which dieth not, and the fire which cannot be quenched. For if the unrighteousness of man in every age and country deserve the wrath of the Almighty, of how much sorer punishment, think you, shall not they be counted worthy, who have trodden under foot the covenant, and neglected or despised its superior mercies; who have violated both their natural and federal obligations to the duties of piety and virtue.

Here then we have the law of the religion of Christ, stated under its most simple form, stripped of those endless and intricate disputes with which it has been overloaded by the prejudices of men, and such as it must ever appear to a godly mind, sincerely desirous of arriving at the truth. The object of the Gospel is the *conditional* salvation of *all* mankind, and as a covenant, propounding the terms for the attainment of this object, it naturally resolves itself into a covenant of mercy and a covenant of wrath,—of mercy, to those who, having entered into it, repent and believe,—of wrath to all its *wilfully* unbelieving and impenitent members.

Admitting, therefore, the truth of this representation of the Gospel, it is impossible that the doctrine of an universal admission of the recipients of baptism into that covenant, can be at-

tended with any immoral consequences. For the same limitations must apply to the *reception* of the blessings of any covenant, which apply to their *continuance*, when once received; and if to *be* an unworthy member of the Christian covenant will effectually prevent its wholesome operation, the wholesome operation of baptism will be equally prevented by our unworthily *becoming* so. Now to *be* under the law, and to live under the influence of the covenant of the Gospel, limits the *continuance* of sanctification and redemption to those alone who *continue* to fulfil the requisite conditions, and confines the favour of pardon and the power of the spirit to those only who repent and believe. To those who will not repent, or who disbelieve, it means only to live under a law of heavier vengeance, and in a fearful looking-for of judgment and of fiery indignation, and no continuance of pardon is assured to them thereby, and no power of the spirit to amend. But baptism we have declared to be the means of our being placed under this law,—the very *door of our entrance* into this covenant. We have only therefore to make the necessary alteration in the terms of the preceding sentence, and we shall obtain an exact and comprehensive proposition, describing the consequences of baptism upon every capable subject. We have only to change the manner of the expression, and to say;—that

to be placed under the law, and *received* into the covenant of the Gospel by baptism, limits the *reception* of sanctification and redemption to those alone who fulfil the required conditions, and confines the *communication* of pardon and the power of the Spirit to those only, who *at the time* repent and believe. To those who will not repent, or who disbelieve, it means only to be placed under a law of heavier vengeance, and admitted into a fearful looking-for of judgment and of fiery indignation, and no pardon is granted to them thereby, and no power of the Spirit to amend. The spiritual blessings of baptism *at the time* of its reception, like the spiritual blessings of the covenant itself, are to be measured by the worthiness of the recipient. And wherever an individual is *capable* of fulfilling the conditions we have specified, his worthiness must of course be estimated according to their fulfilment.

1. If, therefore, a rational and intelligent adult, an adult blessed with the opportunity of learning and the capacity of understanding his duty,—an adult living in a christian country, and attending upon a christian ministry, should presumptuously approach the waters of baptism, without penitence or belief, it is evident that the administration of the ordinance would communicate to him at the time no beneficial effect whatsoever. For the impenitence and unbelief of such

a man must necessarily be considered as a *wilful* want of the requisite qualifications, and consequently as a bar to the benefits of a conditional covenant, whose saving power depends upon the worthiness of its members. And if that bar should still continue, and if that man should go on and live the life and die the death of impenitence and unbelief, doubtless, his damnation will be greater, and his punishment the more severe. He has sinned against the law, and therefore must be judged by the law, and be beaten with many stripes, because he knew, or, at least, had an opportunity of knowing and doing, the will of God, and did it not. Yet I would not dare, even in this extreme case, to say, that baptism, as the solemn institution of my Saviour and my God, is altogether without any *possible* benefit. The case of a wilfully faithless and unrepenting recipient of baptism, is, indeed, in reality as dangerous, as it is horrible in contemplation, and we may well expect, that having sinned against the light of his conscience and the truth, the light will be for ever withdrawn from his eyes, and he himself condemned to all the wickedness and wretchedness of a reprobate mind, the anguish and despair of a hopeless destiny. Still, however, we cannot, without denying the general efficacy of the sacrament itself, deny, that every one is by baptism made either a worthy or unworthy member of the

covenant of grace, of that covenant which admits and rewards the labourers of the vineyard even as late as the eleventh hour of the day, and expressly declares, that "every one that believeth, and is baptised shall be saved," without specifying any particular moment, beyond which, that faith will be ineffectual. Destitute, therefore, as we may be of all rational or probable expectation of such an event, we still feel authorized to maintain, that if the character of an unbelieving and impenitent recipient of baptism should at any subsequent period of life experience a favourable and godly change, and from an unworthy, he should become a worthy member of the Christian covenant; his previous admission into it by baptism will be made effectual to salvation without any second administration of the ordinance: for as there is but one faith, so also there is but one baptism; one admission only into the covenant of the Gospel, which upon the fulfilment of the requisite conditions, whenever that fulfilment may take place, will be followed by the blessings it was intended to convey. We conclude, that though the unworthiness of a recipient of baptism may place an effectual bar to his reception of the spiritual blessings of the Gospel *at the time* of the administration of the ordinance; yet, upon the removal of that bar, the beneficial operation of the sacrament will immediately recur without the

repetition of the initiatory rite. And, I think, we are fully justified in supporting this view of the subject by the manner in which the Scriptures themselves have spoken concerning the baptism of the sorcerer Simon. Simon believed and was baptised, making, no doubt, the usual professions which were in those days required; but his subsequent conduct sufficiently proved that his heart was not right with God. Still, however, his baptism, though received or held by him in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity—though it had not sanctified his soul had not been destitute of all effect: it had placed him within the influence of the covenant, and thus given him a title to pardon and salvation upon the conditions required. He was not, therefore, exhorted to be re-baptised, or to perform any new rite to make himself again a member of the Gospel covenant. He was addressed as already a Christian, though an unworthy one, and commanded only *to repent* for the forgiveness of his sin, and the renewal of his interest in the redemption of Jesus, which from his impenitence, he had either forfeited, or never received. He was, therefore, considered by the apostles, who gave him these directions, as still within the influence of the terms of that covenant, of whose only gift it cometh, that repentance availeth unto everlasting life.

2. That beneficial and wholesome operation of

baptism, which is hindered by the bar of wilful impenitence or unbelief, will of course always and *immediately* take place in every recipient in whom that bar is not to be found. Wherever, therefore, an adult possesses the qualifications of repentance and faith, his baptism will not only place him under the terms of the covenant of grace, but also communicate to him, at the time, the graces of the covenant, and convey to him the pardon of his sins, and the power of the Spirit. Still, however, his redemption is not absolutely sure, but stands suspended upon the future conduct of his life. And if any one like the servant in the parable, should dare to presume upon the forgiveness of baptism, and violate or neglect the qualifications of a saint, like that wicked servant too, his pardon will be recalled, and the hand-writing of ordinances again written against him in the book of everlasting remembrance.

We may seem, perhaps, to have forgotten the words, and the substance of the text; but in all that we have said, we have but been endeavouring to prove the truth and the excellence of the doctrine it contains; to shew that baptism, by making us Christians, does save us, yet not by the mere external and ceremonial washing away of the filth of the flesh, but by the accompanying answer of a good conscience towards God; the answer of a good conscience begun in baptism, through

life continued, then ended in death, and carried with us through the gates of the grave, before the tribunal of the judgment seat of Christ.

But, after all, it is the great and glorious mystery which this day* commemorates, that alone can give saving strength and power to the whole. It is ultimately " by the resurrection of Jesus," that baptism itself is made effectual to salvation. When Jesus was nailed unto the cross, darkness fell upon the earth. For the space of three hours the sun was darkened, and then burst forth again with his accustomed splendour. But had that light of the material world continued in obscurity, the fair face of nature would have become an universal blank, man would have lost his cheerfulness and activity, and the vegetable world have drooped and withered in the ungenial gloom. So for the space of three days the Son of God slumbered in the grave, then burst the bonds of death asunder, and ascended into the bosom of his Father. But had he not risen from the dead, and had his body mouldered away and mingled with the dust, *he* might indeed have expiated our crimes, and procured the pardon of our offences; but *we* could have had no certain testimony of his power to save. As he died so must we die also; and had he continued subject to

* This Sermon was preached on Easter day.

death, we also must have thought that we were to sleep our eternal sleep with him.

But the Lord is risen indeed—risen from the dead to assure life and immortality to his faithful followers; and therefore neither your faith nor your baptism shall be in vain.

DISCOURSE II.

THE NECESSITY AND EFFICACY OF THE BAPTISM OF ADULTS.

ACTS ii. 38.

Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

THE combined result of those various enquiries, which in the preceding discourse we instituted with regard to the nature and efficacy of baptism, may be briefly summed up in the following propositions.

1. Baptism was instituted by Jesus himself as a perpetual and universal, and as a perpetually and universally efficacious ordinance in his Church.

2. The efficacy of the administration of baptism consists in placing *all* who receive it under the influence of the terms of the conditional covenant of the Gospel.

3. Baptism, as it is the door of entrance only into a *conditional* covenant, communicates, when

received, the spiritual blessings of that covenant, the grace of pardon, and the power of the Spirit—to those alone by whom it is *rightly* received.

4. Baptism is rightly and worthily received by those alone who do not obstruct its sanctifying and redeeming operation by any *wilful* want of penitence, or any wilful unbelief.

5. Baptism, however unworthily received, will always resume its saving power upon the removal of the bar of unworthiness, at whatever period of life it may occur.

6. Baptism, however rightly and faithfully received, will not *continue* its beneficial operation upon the recipient, if the recipient does not continue to fulfil the conditions, and retain the qualifications which are required in that covenant, of which he is a member.

Having endeavoured to establish the truth of these conclusions by reasonings upon the nature of the ordinance itself, and the interpretation of various passages of Scripture, we must now change the subject of investigation, and proceed to consider the *necessity* and the *propriety* of baptism, the necessity of its administration to *Christians in general*, and the propriety of its administration to the *children* of Christians in particular, and the different effects which in each of those cases may be regarded as accompanying its reception.

The first difficulty which strikes us in the consideration of the *necessity* of baptism, arises from the important part which the Gospel assigns to the qualities of faith and repentance in the great work of sanctification and redemption. If baptism without faith and repentance be absolutely useless where faith and repentance already are, baptism may perhaps be considered as not absolutely indispensable, especially to such believing penitents, as being born of Christian parents, and living in a Christian country, have, by a uniform attendance upon the services of the Church, and the other ordinances of the Gospel, both frequently and publicly declared themselves to be Christians, and unequivocally professed their belief in the doctrines, and their sincere obedience to the precepts of the Gospel. "If the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?" For what is there of such power in the bare ceremonial washing of water, that the faith and repentance of an unbaptised, should not be accepted in the sight of God as of equal avail with those of a baptised Christian?

The simple and irresistible answer to this question is, that no one can be considered as really and indisputably a Christian in the sight of God, who has not been baptised in obedience to the commandment, and in compliance with the insti-

tution of Christ; and that it is to Christians alone that the redeeming and sanctifying promises of Christianity apply. Were there many means of becoming Christians, doubtless also there would be as many means of making our faith and repentance efficacious to our salvation. But it is under the covenant of the Gospel alone, that we are taught by Revelation either to expect, or to obtain an interest in the sacrifice of the cross; and baptism, so far as we are acquainted with the will of the Author of the Gospel, is the only appointed, and therefore the only effectual means of bringing us under the influence of that covenant. Baptism, so far as we are enabled to learn from the Scriptures of truth, is the only rite which has been ordained for the admission of disciples into that religion which has alone been authorized to grant the assurance of forgiveness to its penitent and believing disciples. Upon this ground, and under these circumstances, we *do* venture to maintain the almost indispensible necessity of baptism to the salvation of all who profess themselves to be the disciples of that religion. We have the warrant of Jesus for the awful denunciation, and under the sanction of the force and clearness of his expressions, we scruple not to declare, that "*except a man be born of water*," as well as of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God; whether we refer to that kingdom as it is

here, or as it shall be hereafter. Not that we would doom to a state of everlasting misery any who are incapable either of knowing or understanding, or fulfilling the commandment. Those who sit in the region of darkness and the shadow of death; the deluded votaries of Mahometism and idolatry, who have been taught, and heard neither of the Gospel nor of baptism, we have no positive or determinate revelation concerning the things which will be required of them, and of them therefore we presume not to speak. Them and their fate we fearlessly leave to the mercy and wisdom of God, who is no respecter of persons, and who knoweth both when and how it becometh him to save or destroy. Neither would we too hastily condemn, or too boldly and severely deny the joyful hope of everlasting life, to any, who from unavoidable error of mind, or the ingrafted prejudices of education, have been habitually and assiduously taught to despise or neglect this sacrament of their Saviour. Judgment belongeth unto God, and having no certain commandment concerning these things, we trust their destiny to him, who always judges according unto right, and punishes or rewards according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not received. Of *these* men it may perhaps be true, " that their uncircumcision, which is by nature, or from circumstances *unavoidable*, will, indeed, be counted

to them for circumcision;" if they keep the righteousness, and obey the precepts of the dispensation under which they live. For it is not of such cases that our Saviour speaks: neither, therefore, do we. What the law says in any instance, it says to those that are under the law; to those that have heard and are capable of comprehending and obeying the law. What Christ says, he says to those who have had an opportunity of being made acquainted with the substance, and perceiving the nature, and understanding the force and obligation of his commandments. And to these men he *does* say, that "except they be born again of water, as well as of the Spirit, they cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." To these men he does say, that except they submit to the ceremony of baptism, which he has ordained in his Church, they cannot become members of the covenant, and by consequence, not partakers of the blessings of the Gospel. Neither is this so harsh a declaration as perhaps, at first sight, it may appear to be. Baptism rests not upon its own intrinsic nature for the efficacy we have described. It was practised in many ages, and by many nations, without being supposed to be accompanied by any of those benefits which (when worthily received) we have ascribed to it as a Christian ordinance. The power and the dignity of which it is now possessed, are derived from the appointment of Jesus

Hæc enim "qui credit, condemnatur" nullatenus est absolute intelligendum, sed de his, qui, audito Evangelio, credere noluerunt

Christ. The washing of water is made effectual only *by the word* of its institution, and it is from its obligation as a Gospel rite and a Gospel commandment, that the advantage of receiving, and the danger of neglecting it arise. But *he* cannot reckon himself a true disciple of Christ who does not endeavour, to the utmost of his power, to keep *all* his commandments; and if any capable and intelligent individual to whom the Gospel has been preached, and who has received the Gospel, should presumptuously neglect, or pertinaciously refuse to submit to a rite, which he acknowledges his Master to have ordained as perpetual and universal in the Church; he is guilty of such an act of wilful disobedience as may well and justly call down upon him the prohibition of entering into the kingdom of God. If, indeed, it were true, as it has been pretended by some, that our Saviour himself has limited in another place the universality of the judgment which he pronounced against the unbaptised of water in his conversation with Nicodemus, that limitation ought to be thankfully and freely allowed. I confess, however, that I cannot perceive any foundation for the remark. I observe, that Jesus concluded his commission to the Apostles by a gracious promise, that "whosoever believeth and is baptised, shall be saved;" and I observe also, that in the verse which immediately follows, he declares only

that "he that believeth not shall be damned." But the only conclusion which I should feel myself authorized to deduce from this altered form of expression would be, that both faith *and* baptism are necessary to salvation, whilst baptism without faith, though it maketh us Christians, will not, as Christians, be effectual to redeem us from damnation. The connection in which the declarations stand with each other, appear to me to prove only, that whosoever believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but that "whosoever believeth not," though he be baptised, "shall be damned." Nor have I been able in the pages of the New Testament to find an instance of any individual, however strong his faith, or sincere his penitence, however holy his heart, or exemplary his life, in which, if there was room for the administration of baptism, the administration of baptism does not seem to have been required as essential to salvation. The case of the penitent thief is altogether out of the question. It was impossible, in the dying agonies of the cross, that he should have submitted to the ordinance of baptism, had the ordinance at that time existed as a commandment of Jesus, and it is *not* impossible that he might have been already admitted under the influence of the covenant of grace by the circumcision of his infancy as a Jew. But even were the case otherwise, it is an example of such a

peculiar nature as cannot with propriety be admitted in almost any of its circumstances as a precedent for the direction of future ages. But, on the other hand, I can find many unequivocal instances, which seem to enforce, beyond the possibility of resistance, the great, if not the indispensable, necessity of baptism, wherever it may, and wherever it is confessed that it ought to be had.

The conduct of Jesus himself, and the reasons which he condescended to assign for that conduct, are of course the first that occur to the recollection of any one. John had a commission to baptise with the baptism of repentance. Repentance was of all things the most unnecessary for Jesus, who knew no sin. Yet did this sinless person submit to the baptism of repentance, because as he himself expressly remarked, " it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," to do every thing, and to submit to every rite and ceremony which has either been directly ordained by God himself, by a prophet of God, or by the Church, in conformity to God's will. The merit and advantages of this act were instantaneously made visible. He was immediately declared to be the beloved Son of God, beloved still more by this additional proof of his obedience; and the Spirit of God descended and rested upon him. What thus became the Master may well become the servant,

be he who he may. The disciple is not above his Lord, and the disciple cannot consequently be considered as exempt from the performance of that rite, a submission to which was deemed by his Lord, a necessary ingredient in the fulfilment of righteousness.

The application of the baptism of Jesus by John, as a proof of the necessity of Christian baptism, may possibly be considered as not strictly relevant, because it refers to a transaction which took place before baptism had been elevated into a Christian sacrament. But I cannot perceive that such a circumstance can make any further alteration, than that of increasing the force of the argument, and the propriety of the conclusion. For if the baptism of John was worthy of such reverential obedience, and capable of producing such beneficial effects, how much more binding, and holy, and efficacious must not the baptism of Jesus be? This, however, is a matter of but little consequence, for in turning again to the records of the New Testament, we find from the tenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles (v. 44 to 48) that even those who had received the most extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit, and thus been honoured with the public testimony of God to their inward baptism, were not on that account at all relieved from the necessity of a submission to the external ordinance. Cornelius

was a just and a devout man, and a man of charity, and his alms and his prayers went up for a memorial before God. Yet his justice, and his devotion, and his charity, instead of rendering the administration of baptism either ineffectual or unnecessary, were pronounced by the angel of the vision to be but an additional reason why he *ought* to be baptised. "Send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter; he will tell thee what thou *oughtest* to do." Cornelius obeyed the direction, and Peter declared that what he ought to do, was to be baptised, making the miraculous descent of the Holy Ghost the very ground and reason of his decision. "These men," said he, "have received the Holy Ghost as well as we; Can any man forbid water that they should not be baptised?" Those who had been pronounced worthy of being made Christians by the testimony of an extraordinary demonstration from heaven, he considered, even though Gentiles, as worthy, and more especially bound to make themselves to be so, by an obedience to that holy rite which Jesus had instituted for the reception of his disciples.

But the most satisfactory proof both of the reality and of the reason of the necessity of baptism, may be drawn from an investigation of the conversion and subsequent baptism of St. Paul;

Of all the conversions which have been recorded, that of St. Paul is the most unquestionably authentic and astonishing. He verily thought that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. "Wherefore as he went to Damascus (with authority from the chief Priest to persecute this way unto death), suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven, and he fell to the earth (trembling and astonished) and said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into Damascus, and there it shall be told thee what thou *must* do. And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias, and to him said the Lord in a vision, Arise, and go and enquire for one called Saul of Tarsus; for behold he prayeth. He is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles and Kings. And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house, and said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be *filled with the Holy Ghost*. And now, why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptised, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. And he arose and was baptised." The first thing which may be deduced from this narrative is, the undoubted

sincerity with which St. Paul repented and believed the Gospel, a sincerity which is most satisfactorily proved by his words, by his conduct, and by the declarations of God; by his words, in addressing Jesus as his Lord; by his conduct, in that he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink; by the declaration of God, who openly approved his prayer, and pronounced him to be a chosen vessel for the propagation of the religion which he had embraced. From a faithless Jew he became a faithful Christian; from a persecutor a penitent; from one, whose lips yet breathed out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, he became humbled, convicted, and convinced. Yet with all these marks and testimonies of a real conversion of the heart and the understanding; testimonies which Heaven itself vouchsafed to communicate to mankind, still one thing was wanting to redeem him from the bond of iniquity. The thing which he was appointed to do was to be baptised, and the object of that baptism is expressly stated to have been, that he *might wash away his sins*, and receive the fulness of the Holy Ghost. With all the qualifications, therefore, which adorn a worthy member of the Christian covenant, he was not actually in possession of the blessings of that covenant, because he had not actually made himself a Christian by his sub-

mission to the ceremonial ordinance of baptism. The grace of the Gospel was suspended upon the administration of a sacrament, and before his baptism he had neither washed away his sins, nor been filled with the Holy Ghost. Doubtless, the sins of St. Paul were already forgiven in the counsels of the Almighty, even whilst he persecuted the way of the Gospel unto death. But that forgiveness was neither visibly sealed, nor formally conferred, nor actually received by him until his baptism by Ananias. Pardon must in every case be granted in the mind of the judge before it is communicated either in fact or in form to the criminal. How long or how short that period may be is uncertain and various; but some space of time must always intervene between the intention and the act, between the virtual and the absolute pardon of an offence. And if the pardon be made by a declaration of the offended being, to depend upon the performance of some *rite*, as well as the possession of some qualifications, the performance of that rite, however generally inefficacious and insignificant in itself, becomes as indispensable, in all ordinary instances at least, to the completion of the pardon, as the possession of those qualifications, however important or meritorious. For the law is in this case entirely in the hands and at the disposition of the judge, to forgive or withhold

his forgiveness upon any conditions which he may choose, and those conditions are equally binding, whether they consist in moral or ceremonial acts. Now we find, that the thing which was appointed as a condition to St. Paul, the thing which he was told he *must* do, to wash away his sins, was to be baptised. Baptism therefore to St. Paul, in the situation in which he was placed, became an indispensable condition of the remission of sin, without which he neither was nor would have been forgiven, either in fact or in form. For he knew and he perceived the obligation of the sacrament; and he knew and perceived that he had an opportunity of obtaining the celebration of the rite; and if, under these circumstances, he had either presumptuously refused or wilfully avoided the performance of the command, his sins would not have been washed away at all; neither were they really and thoroughly washed away with all his penitence, and prayers, and fastings, and faith, until the ceremony had been fulfilled. But *he* was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. He arose and was baptised, and forgiven; and as a consequence and an evidence of that forgiveness, he was filled with the Holy Ghost. That measure of the Spirit, which was necessary to enable him to fulfill the duties *antecedent* to baptism, the grace of repentance towards God and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ, it cannot be de-

nied that he had already received; for he both repented and believed; and we know, that "we are not sufficient of ourselves to do any thing as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God." But a greater measure of the Spirit was given to him at his baptism than he had enjoyed before; a measure sufficient to enable him to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to fulfil to the utmost the various duties which are consistent and consequent upon baptism. "He was filled with the Holy Ghost," so far as he was either capable of receiving or of using it; "and straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God, and increased the more in strength, proving that this is the very Christ." The effects of baptism upon St. Paul may therefore be most accurately described in the words by which our Church has defined the nature of a sacrament. It was an outward and visible sign of the remission of his sin, and the gift of the Holy Ghost; and though not the *reason for* which, yet the means *by which*, both in fact and in form, he received the same, and a pledge to assure him thereof.

From this investigation we may very fairly conclude, that to every one, who is placed in similar circumstances with St. Paul, the sacrament of baptism is alike necessary and alike useful. To every adult, who perceives the obligation, and

has an opportunity offered him of submitting to the rite, it is indispensable not only that he believe and repent, but that he believe, repent, *and* be baptised for the remission of sin. It is baptism which is the crown and the seal of the whole, without which, when it may be had, and when it is known that it ought to be had, the rest are inefficacious to admit us to the benefits of the covenant. Grace, no doubt, is given to us, as to St. Paul, to repent and believe *before* we have been baptised; but it is *in* baptism alone that the gift of the Holy Ghost is confirmed and increased, according to our capacity for receiving and improving it. Pardon also may, no doubt, have been virtually granted by God, *before* we have been baptised; but *in* baptism only is it visibly sealed, in baptism only is it actually conferred; in baptism only is it actually received by man. But the reason of this necessity and efficacy is to be sought for solely in the appointment of God, who has thought fit in his wisdom to ordain baptism to be the *ceremonial*, as he has ordained faith and penitence to be the moral conditions of our salvation. It is a sacrament, therefore, in the most legitimate sense of the word, an outward sign of the forgiveness of sins, and of the gift of the Holy Ghost; and, though not the cause meritorious for which that grace is granted, yet, most undoubtedly, a means

instrumental by which we receive the same, as well as a pledge to assure us thereof.

This is the doctrine of the text and of the Church, and therefore, though it be a doctrine which both may be and has been perverted to the worst of purposes, we dare not shrink from declaring it as true. We remember, that the best of God's gifts have been equally abused, that it is a misfortune which it shares in common with Christianity itself; and we can only lament, that the weakness and wickedness of man should draw the waters of bitterness from the wells of salvation.

DISCOURSE III.

THE PROPRIETY AND EFFICACY OF THE BAPTISM OF INFANTS.

MARK X. 14.

Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God.

WE have obtained a clear and correct conception both of the foundation and the extent of the necessity of baptism to the salvation of *adults*, and drawn out a scheme of its obligations and effects which, so far as it relates to them, would appear in every moral point of view to be entirely unobjectionable.

But still there remains another both very difficult and very important enquiry. All those of whom we have hitherto spoken have been supposed *capable* of attaining the qualifications required in a recipient of baptism. Why then are subjects *incapable* of these qualifications baptised at all? Why has the Church appointed for infants

the celebration of a sacrament, which demands that penitence of which the sinlessness of a child has no need, and that faith which the understanding of a child cannot possibly attain? Or, what are those effects which can possibly flow from the bare administration of the rite to an unintelligent child?

It is precisely upon the incapacity of children to acquire the graces of repentance and faith, that we may best defend the propriety of infant baptism. The custom of the Church, the testimony of the Fathers, and the probable and persuasive arguments, which have been so frequently and forcibly urged from the analogy of circumcision and the general language of Scripture, in speaking of the baptism of *whole* households and nations, may well be considered as sufficient to justify any Church in adopting, and any individual in acquiescing in the continuance of a practice, which has been so widely established and so freely allowed. But its strict and legitimate *propriety* can only be built upon its consistency with the declarations and doctrines of the Gospel; can only be made convincing to the mind and binding upon the conscience, by shewing that it does not interfere with any of those principles upon which the efficacy of the sacrament is made in general to depend. We must, therefore, again return to the doctrine of covenants, and

examine whether the Gospel be a covenant of that harsh and unbending nature as to require, in every case, the literal fulfilment of the conditions, and to make the actual possession of repentance and faith the universal and indispensable pre-requisites of the wholesome operation of baptism. For if that be the case, it is evident that infants, not actually possessing these graces, are not worthy recipients. But if there be any probable inducements to lead to a different conclusion, we may very fairly be permitted to consider the natural incapacity of children to place any *wilful* bar to the operation of the covenant, as a sufficient proof of their worthiness to be admitted under its influence.

"Except ye repent ye shall all perish;" and "he that believeth not," however duly and legitimately baptised, "shall be damned." From these and from similar passages in the New Testament, it would seem as if repentance and faith were positively laid down as the indispensable conditions or qualifications of the beneficial and saving efficacy of the Gospel covenant in *every* case; and consequently, that in every case, the bare absence of these conditions and qualifications ought to be regarded as an insuperable bar to a participation in its blessings; and were the Gospel a common covenant between man and man, such would undoubtedly be the conclusion

we ought to form. Were the Gospel an ordinary covenant between two equal parties entering into mutual obligations, and conferring mutual benefits, it would follow, that it could be of no avail whatever in any instance in which the conditions were not strictly and literally fulfilled; in any instance in which there was not both actual faith and actual penitence; and thus the covenant would be made of none effect to every individual, who from circumstances was incapable of either; whether those circumstances originated in himself, or were the unavoidable effect of the situation in which he was placed, or of some natural defect in his created faculties. The simple want either of faith or penitence would, in that case, be an absolute bar to the beneficial operation of the covenant. But the Gospel is a covenant of grace, a dispensation of mercy from a superior to an inferior being; from God who has unrestricted power over all his creatures, to man who is one of those creatures. So far therefore from being considered as strict and undeviating in its terms, it ought always to be interpreted in favour of those for whose benefit it was revealed, and explained with the utmost latitude, which is consistent with the attributes and intentions and declarations of the Being, from whose benevolence it sprung. None ought to be excluded from the means and opportunities of being made disciples

of the Gospel, who may with propriety and probability be comprehended within the limits of infinite mercy, and are not positively excluded by the terms of the covenant, or by any legitimate conclusion which may be drawn from those terms.

It becomes therefore a most important and necessary part of our investigation, to enquire upon what grounds and to what extent the conditions of repentance and faith are exacted from man in the Gospel of Christ; and we must endeavour to determine both in what sense and to what persons those conditions are declared to be indispensable to a participation in the blessings of the covenant, and by consequence, pre-requisites of the wholesome operation of baptism.

1. In the first place then it may safely be asserted, that faith and repentance are not the meritorious conditions of the salvation of the members of Christianity; and if this distinction had been carefully observed and openly allowed, it might not perhaps have altogether precluded that difference of opinion, which has so long been entertained upon the qualifications of baptism; but it certainly would have prevented much of that animosity to which this difference of opinion has given rise. For, every thing that we are, and every thing that we do, it is by the grace of God. We are not sufficient of ourselves to do any

thing as of ourselves; and therefore not even to turn and prepare ourselves for a participation in the redemption of Jesus, by the acquisition of the virtues of repentance and faith. Our sufficiency for that, as well as for any other good work, must be of God; and consequently, being the gift of his goodness, cannot claim from his justice the reward of redemption as a debt. For no reward can be said, in strictness, to be due from the giver to the possessor of a gift, merely for the sake and on account of that gift. It would appear, therefore, that repentance and faith, though they may be described and considered as the conditions of the Gospel, are not, however perfect and complete in themselves, the causes for which, from their intrinsic value, we become in right entitled to an admission into the kingdom of heaven. And hence it necessarily follows, that there is no imperative reason for the exclusion of infants from the sacrament of admission, on the ground of their want of those qualifications. For, the efficiency of those qualifications does not result from their inherent merit, and their want, therefore, does not in itself imply any absolute want of merit in the recipient of baptism.

2. Having thus pointed out the incorrectness of that opinion, which would build the worthiness of the recipient of baptism upon the merit of the required conditions, and exclude infants from the

sacrament because they are incapable of that merit, we would observe, in the second place, that it is equally incorrect as an universal proposition to say, that the qualifications of faith and repentance are so indispensably the conditions of our admission into the kingdom of heaven, that it is impossible that any one should be admitted without them. For the extent of every proposition, however unrestricted in its language, must always be limited in its application by the nature of the subject, and the circumstances of the individuals to whom it refers; and if a commandment, with a promise or a judgement annexed, be uttered by a being, whose attributes and intentions are known, the intentions and attributes of that being, combined with the powers and capacities of those who are the objects of the command, must be made the measure by which we are to decide upon the necessity and consequences of obedience or disobedience in each particular case. However positive, therefore, the words of our Saviour may seem to be, and however distinctly and decidedly they may appear to convey the certain condemnation of all who are destitute of repentance and faith, we must be careful to confine their application within those limits, which the comprehensive benevolence and perfection of their Author prescribe. The Scriptures expressly declare, that the goodness of God would not that

any should perish. It is therefore the evident will and wish of the Deity, that *all* should participate in the blessings of the covenant, and consequently, that *all* should be admitted into that covenant by the sacrament of baptism, which is the only appointed means of attaining that end. And as the power of the Deity is infinite, he will, of course, communicate the blessings of that sacrament to all who are not excluded by something, which, being inconsistent with the other perfections of his nature, may induce him to restrain the exertion of his power. Now the justice of God requires only the absence of all moral guilt; his holiness only the absence of every unholy thing, and the wisdom of his mercy will never demand from any dependent being the performance of duties, which he could neither know nor fulfil; or punish him for a want, which it was out of his power to remedy. The want of faith and repentance, therefore, in an incapable and innocent recipient of baptism, as they are unaccompanied by any moral guilt, and imply not the existence of any unholy disposition, cannot possibly be regarded as any solid obstacles to their participation in the blessings of the covenant into which they are admitted. But the conclusion is very different, when we consider the case of intelligent *adults.* Conscious of guilt, and capable of faith; with power to comprehend, and powers to fulfil what is

required, the mere absence of faith and repentance in them proves the presence of the opposites, and implies beyond the possibility of a doubt, that their hearts are still in a state of wilful impenitence and wilful unbelief, which are insurmountable obstacles to the mercies of a holy Being. Under these circumstances, therefore, we venture to place within the influence of the blessings, which arise from an admission into the covenant of the Gospel by baptism, all who from a sinless state have no need of repentance, and all, who from any intellectual cause, are under an incapacity of belief. For God *can*, when we look upon his power; *may*, when we look upon his holiness; and *will*, doubtless, when we reflect upon his goodness, dispense with the conditions he has prescribed to his people; and communicate the blessings of the Christian covenant to all who, like infants, do nothing to oppose the kindness of his will; to all who do not oppose to his beneficent intentions the *wilful*, and therefore culpable, bar of impenitence and unbelief. We hold, that the saving mercies of an all-merciful Creator are not presumptuously to be limited by the necessary and natural imperfections of the creature, and thus establish the propriety of infant baptism, so far as it is affected by their want of repentance and faith, upon the very ground of their incapacity to attain those graces. For as it is

with regard to the necessity of the *sacrament* of baptism, so it is with regard to the necessity of, what from the imperfections of language we are obliged to call, the *conditions* of that sacrament. There may be a want of the sacrament, or a want of the conditions; a want of the ceremonial, or of the moral qualifications of a Christian. But if the want be not wilful or culpable, the goodness of God will not regard it as a bar to the operation of his covenant, or the participation of his grace. Indeed, were we to exact in *every* instance the possession and presence of those qualities, which are the *general* conditions of the beneficial efficacy of any ordinance, we should condemn even our Saviour himself as unworthy to have received the baptism of repentance from St. John, and cast a censure upon the Deity for having testified his approbation of the deed by an open descent of the Holy Ghost. The real fact, however, is this, that every institution of God will work the work for which it was ordained upon every recipient, who does not oppose the object, and hinder the operation of the rite; and consequently, that faith and repentance are the indispensable pre-requisites of baptism in those cases and individuals *alone*, in which their absence implies a state of impenitence and unbelief, or some other evil disposition of mind, which the holiness of the Deity cannot consistently overlook. The conditions of a

sacrament, like the sacrament itself, are only *generally* necessary to the salvation of man; and this is evidently a necessity, which does not properly apply to the circumstances of a child in the administration of baptism.

3. If then the want of repentance and faith is not in itself a sufficient proof of the unworthiness of a recipient of baptism, the arguments against the propriety of infant baptism, which are raised upon that foundation alone, must necessarily be given up, and we must oppose the practice, either upon the ground of some inherent and natural unworthiness in the child, or upon the impossibility of his giving that consent to the performance of the act, which we have stated to belong to the ratification of a covenant.

Now the natural unworthiness of a child, who has been guilty of no actual crime, and having known no law, can have transgressed no law, to become a member of the Christian covenant, and a partaker in the blessings it conveys to its members, can only be derived from that moral stain, which, as the offspring of Adam, it inherits from the disobedience of a fallen parent; and the solution of the difficulty, which arises from this objection to the practice of infant baptism, would seem, therefore, to involve an enquiry into all the various and fatal consequences of the original sin. But the unequivocal language of the Scrip-

tures has fortunately removed the necessity of this intricate and obscure investigation. For they have taught us, that whatever may have been the effects of the transgression of Adam upon his posterity, and however widely and deeply it may have entailed upon us the curse and corruption of our nature, that curse and corruption are neither so pernicious or sinful as to make us unworthy to participate in the blessings of the redemption of Jesus, *independent* of the commission of actual sin. The innocence of the infant is expressly declared by our Saviour himself to be the peculiar object of the mercy of God; that very disposition which he requires in those whom he intends to adopt into the family of his Son. "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein;" he cannot be redeemed through the blood of the covenant. "For of such," as are children in reality, or of such as resemble them in simplicity of mind and purity of heart, and of such only, says he, "is the kingdom of God." However born in sin, therefore, and the children of wrath, it is not a sin so grievous, or a wrath so heavy, as to preclude the children of men, merely as such, from being made the children of grace by the legal administration of baptism. For wherever the Gospel has explicitly pronounced upon the fitness of an individual to receive the benefits of an or-

"For Christ" - "Non infantium apud Judæos, apud Græcos, ad omnes sui mihi offerunt"
See Lawrence Rampton Lect. P. 263 -
I much doubt the propriety of this mistaken for the children now Jews, & our Saviour in another place said, "Except ye become as little children (not as these little children) ye cannot do -

dinance, we may safely conclude that individual to be fit to receive the ordinance itself. An acknowledged worthiness to partake in the end, which has been proposed, implies a worthiness also to partake in the means, which have been appointed for the attainment of the end.

4. So far, therefore, as the worthiness of the recipient of baptism is of a moral nature, children are included in the number of worthy recipients by the unequivocal testimony of Scripture itself; and if we still argue for their being rejected from the administration of the ordinance, it must be upon the ground of their incapacity to assent to the terms of the religion, into which they are initiated by the rite.

There exists, I apprehend, a considerable degree of misconception with regard to the necessity of *expressing* our consent to the conditions of the Gospel, and the part it bears in the work of our salvation. Wherever Christianity has been preached and believed, or a sufficient reason and opportunity for belief afforded to man, his agreement is *presumed* from the natural obligation of every created being to acquiesce in the propositions of a wise and merciful Creator; and, though the Church requires from every adult a positive and verbal assent to the terms of the covenant, into which he is to be initiated by baptism, it is only that she may be assured, as far as it is pos-

sible to obtain an assurance upon the subject, that she is not administering the sacrament to an unworthy recipient. It is not from any idea of the power, which she conceives the avowal of that consent can possibly possess over the efficacy of the rite; but because she would be justified in the performance of her sacred work, and avoid the guilt of prostituting the holy ordinance to one, who was destitute of the qualifications it requires. In the same manner, she requires the consent of the *sureties* for the infant recipient; not because she considers the avowal of that consent as necessary to the immediate operation of baptism; but because she thus secures, to the utmost of her power, the instruction of the child in its duties and its privileges; and because she knows, that if he be so instructed and trained, he is "*bound* to believe and to do as they have promised for him." That this is the real reason of her conduct is sufficiently evident from the *omission* of sponsors in the practice of private baptism, which she permits only to be administered in cases of extreme necessity; in cases where the weakness and disease of the child may render it more than probable, that death will remove him before he can understand the nature and the duties of his calling. The Church *there* rests upon the natural obligation of every human being to consent to the terms of every covenant, which

may have been revealed from the beneficence of the Almighty in his favour. She very justly conceives the assent of the infant to be implied in the unalterable relation which, as a creature, it bears to the Creator, and therefore waves the demand of any formal declaration, under a conviction, that such a declaration could not, even if expressed, *deserve* the mercies of God; or, because absent, be an impediment to the operation of his grace. For, the benefits of the Christian covenant flow entirely from the benevolence and power of the superior party in the contract; and the concurrence of the inferior is, therefore, under the circumstances of the case, by no means essential to its efficacy. The blessings may be conferred without either the knowledge or consent of the blessed. The holiness of the Benefactor alone requires, that there should be nothing unholy to prevent the exercise of his power.

From these considerations it would appear, that there is in infants no moral defect to render them incapable of receiving the grace of God, and no physical defect to place a bar to the operation of the covenant of the Gospel in their favour. Infants therefore are, in every sense of the word, to be regarded as *worthy* recipients of the sacrament of baptism; and it necessarily follows, as a consequence of this admission, that all the beneficial results of baptism which they want, and of

which they are capable, will be communicated to them at the moment of its reception; because they have neither the will nor the power to hinder its effects upon their soul. The beneficial results of baptism are the remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Ghost. In order, therefore, to understand the benefits of the sacrament in this case, we must examine into the necessities and capacities of children; their necessities for pardon, and their capacities for grace.

Now the only sin, under which the innocence of a child can be conceived to labour; and the only sin, therefore, from the influence of which it can require an immediate liberation, is that of *original* sin; and of that we are only so far and in such a sense guilty, as to be rendered liable to its general consequences upon the happiness and holiness of human nature. All infants therefore are, by their reception through baptism into the number of the elect, relieved from those consequences in such a manner, and to such a degree, as is consistent with the attributes of the Deity, and the promises which he has revealed, through Jesus Christ, to redeem Adam and his posterity from ruin. Now, the first effect of this redemption, through grace, is the remission of *that* death, which was the direct and appointed penalty of our first parents' crime. "For, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by

sin: so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men to the justification of life. But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. Judgment was by one offence to condemnation; but the free gift is of many offences unto justification, through the blood of Jesus;" and upon the conditions of the covenant; conditions which are always implied, when our justification is spoken of in the Gospel. The infant, therefore, who by baptism is made a member of the covenant, is not only relieved from the punishment which was entailed upon him by the transgression of Adam, but also placed in a state of *conditional* salvation, with regard to his future and actual sins, and entitled, like every other receiver of the sacrament, to the pardon of his own individual violation of the law, whenever by earnest repentance and sincere belief, he shall have renewed to himself an interest in the sacrifice of the cross. Such is the nature and extent of that remission of sins, which we may safely pronounce to be the *universal* concomitant of infant baptism.

But there is a very considerable degree of difficulty attending the consideration of the other benefit of baptism; and it would seem almost impossible to determine, with any tolerable accuracy, that precise and *exact* portion of the Holy Spirit, which may be supposed to accompany the administration of the rite to an unintelligent

mind. The necessities of a child would scarce appear to demand, and the capacity of a child would almost appear to deny, the use of the gift, and the subject must therefore remain in an undecided state for ever, unless we can positively ascertain the precise degree both of will and power to act, which is possessed in the early and unthinking stages of infancy. This, however, is certain, if the principles we have already advanced can be at all relied upon, that the power of the Spirit to perform their duty is the necessary consequence of baptism in every *worthy* recipient; and that infants are to be numbered amongst these worthy recipients, I cannot doubt. To every infant, therefore, there must be communicated in baptism, together with the remission of sins, the gift of the Holy Ghost, according to their capability of receiving and using it; together with a freedom from the *punishment;* a means of redemption also from the *consequences* of original sin. Infant baptism we maintain to be universally attended with such a measure of the Holy Ghost, as may correct and enlighten the gradually opening faculties of the child, with such a measure of grace, as may enable it to bring the instruction which is afforded it to good effect, as may enable it both to will and to do such things as are pleasing to God, and profitable to man; as may enable it, *if diligently used,* to attain a real

about Heathen children

Luther seems to have been doubtful x or at least unwilling to affirm any thing positive. In Lawrence B. 1. 264. Zwingle appeared a favorable sign for all. P. 280 - Calvin for non but those distinguished by a personal election from God's unerring purpose -

sanctification of heart; and, if duly improved, to go on from strength to strength, perfecting holiness in the fear and by the power of the Lord; and so, finally, to carry the answer of a good conscience towards God through life, and through death, unto the day of judgment, and before the tribunal of Christ. These blessings we do maintain to be the uniformly concomitant graces of infant baptism; and upon this foundation we build the *propriety* of the practice, and under these circumstances we boldly ask, "Who can forbid water that these should not be baptised," whom the Lord of Heaven hath himself declared to be meet partakers of the kingdom of heaven.

Whether the benefits which we hold to be thus conferred upon infants in baptism, would have been equally or at all conferred without the administration of the rite, we cannot tell. Doubtless the mercy of God is great; doubtless none will be condemned to everlasting misery; doubtless none will be deprived of their portion of everlasting happiness, but for causes which may justify the ways and works of the Almighty. We may believe, we may hope, and we may trust, that no child shall be bereaved of the comfortable assurance of salvation for that which arises not from its own fault; and that therefore the defect of baptism ought not to be held damnatory to an innocent child. But this can be no satisfactory

reason for the uniform and premeditated omission of that rite; which, besides the incidental advantage of obtaining additional security for the godly instruction of the recipient, and shewing *our* reverence and submission to an ordinance of the Lord, changes our doubt into certainty; and, instead of thinking, *makes us sure,* that our children have the promise of eternal life. Though it should be proved, therefore, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that the practice of infant baptism is not absolutely commanded in Scripture, yet it must be allowed at the same time, that there is nothing in Revelation to forbid, and every thing in reason to recommend it as a holy and useful ordinance. *Necessary* it may not be; but *proper* it most undoubtedly appears to be in a very high degree. I would not, therefore, condemn that Church as altogether heretical and unsound, which omitted to baptise the infants of its own communion; neither would I withdraw from my own, were she to forego the rite. But I deem her the more prudent and pious for the conduct she pursues; and I love and revere her the more for her prudence and her piety.

DISCOURSE IV.

THE NATURE OF BAPTISMAL REGENERATION.

JOHN iii. 3. 5.

Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

WE have hitherto abstained from the use of every controverted term, and in endeavouring to delineate the effects and efficacy of baptism, have adopted the simplest forms of expression which our language would afford, and carefully avoided both the word and the subject of spiritual regeneration. Regeneration, however, appears to be intimately connected with the ceremony of baptism both by the Scriptures and the Church; by the Scriptures, in the text before us, and in a corresponding passage of St. Paul; by the Church, both in her Catechism, and in her Baptismal Offices. As Christians and as Ministers, therefore, we are bound to examine this very in-

tricate question, and, proceeding in the spirit of meekness and of charity, to labour after such a definition of the term, as may at once be consistent with the declarations of the Gospel, and the plain and literal meaning of the established Liturgy.

Nicodemus came to Jesus by night; and Jesus said unto him, "Except a man be born again of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." This verbal union of the elemental and spiritual birth would naturally lead us to imagine, that they are very frequently united in the time and subjects of their occurrence. But as the mere juxta-position of terms does not necessarily imply any absolute or universal inseparability in fact, we must proceed to determine the time when regeneration takes place, by an examination into its nature and essence; for, though the point in controversy regards only the period at which regeneration occurs, the solution of the question depends upon the definition of the word. Before therefore we proceed one single step further, or pretend to solve the difficulties which attend the subject of regeneration, we must try to obtain a thorough understanding of the thing to be done, and the advantages of doing it. We must enquire faithfully, that we may learn truly, what is the kingdom of heaven into which we cannot enter without being born again;

and what is that new and spiritual birth, without which it cannot be obtained.

The "kingdom of heaven" is applied in the Gospel to several distinct and different subjects; to the visible Church upon earth, or to the invisible Church in heaven; to the virtues which adorn the Christian here, or to the exceeding reward which shall be given to him hereafter. But to none of these senses in particular is the expression limited in the text, and it ought therefore in justice to be considered, in some respects, as intending them all. But as the *last* and most important of these significations comprehends the very end and aim of our being; that, without which all the rest will be utterly unavailing to secure the happiness of an immortal soul; it will only be requisite, upon the present occasion, to enquire in what sense it is necessary that we should be "born again," in order to attain to that eternal rest, which is enjoyed by the glorified saints above, in order that we may actually enter into the *literal* kingdom of heaven.

The metaphors of our Saviour are seldom, if ever, to be degraded into the mere ornaments of speech. They are rather to be regarded as the means of conveying to the mind a more definite conception of the object he has in view, and representing some strong analogy in the thing of which he is speaking, to the leading features of

the thing, to which it is compared. It is not necessary, that the resemblance should be strictly pursued into every particular; it is sufficient for our purpose, that it be obviously and *generally* correct.

Guided in our enquiries by this rule of interpretation, we may observe, that there is always implied in the process of the *natural* birth of any human being, the passage of that being from a state of darkness into light; from the darkness of the womb into the light of this material world, and the simultaneous communication of the means necessary for the continuance of his existence in that world into which he has been born. This constitutes the leading characteristic of our *natural* birth; and, consequently, to be born again, and of the *Spirit*, if it be compared at all with its prototype, must necessarily imply the passage of a human being from a state of spiritual darkness into spiritual light, and the simultaneous communication of the means necessary for the continuance of his existence in that spiritual world into which he has been introduced.

We are naturally led, therefore, by this interpretation of the second birth, to inquire in what sense the Scriptures have spoken of our passage from a state of spiritual darkness into light.

"Ye were once darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord," says the Apostle St. Paul to the Ephesians, after they had been converted and baptised into the faith of Jesus Christ. What he means by the use of these terms darkness and light, and what is comprehended in the nature of that change to which he alludes, he has very clearly and satisfactorily explained to us in the 12th and 13th verses of the iid chapter. "At that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." This was their spiritual darkness. "But now," continues he, "in Christ Jesus, ye, who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ, for he is our peace." And this was their spiritual light. At whatever time, therefore, we are made nigh to God; at whatever time we cease to be aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and become members of the covenants of promise, and begin to have hope in the world, and the Lord for our God; *that* is the hour in which we may be said to be "born again;" because that is the hour in which we pass from a state of spiritual darkness into a state of spiritual light. Again, the same Apostle intimates to the Colossians, chap. i. 13, 14, that "to be delivered from the power of darkness," is to be "translated into the kingdom of God's dear

Son, and so to have redemption through the blood of Jesus, even the forgiveness of our sins.

Whatever, therefore, that thing may be, through whose instrumentality we are translated into the kingdom of the Son of God, and obtain an interest in the redemption of the Gospel, and receive the *remission of sins; that*, whether it be a Christian virtue or a Christian ordinance, is also the means by which we may be said to be "born again," because it is the means by which we pass from a state of spiritual darkness into a state of spiritual light; from the dreary despair of an unpardoned criminal, to the joyful expectation of the redeemed in the Lord.

But, if we have been reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being justified through his blood shall we receive from the same merciful source of wisdom and of power, the means of *continuing* in that state of reconciliation. It would be strange indeed, if God should restore us to his favour, and still leave us under a necessary subjection to that infirmity of the flesh, and that helplessness of our nature, which would inevitably alienate from us the blessing we have received. It would be strange indeed, if, after having cleansed us from the pollution of our former sins, he should leave us under the absolute dominion of the same sins for the future, without the possibility of retaining the holiness

we have acquired. "We are made free from sin, that we may become the servants of righteousness." That is the object of our calling and our atonement. We know this from St. Paul, that if an old man be crucified, it is "that the body of sin may be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin," (Rom. vi. 6). *That* is the purpose for which our sins are pardoned, and that cannot be realised, except we be endowed with the power of overcoming the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

To as many as received Christ, (and all must have received him, who from him have received pardon of their sins) "to as many as received him," says St. John, chap. i. 12, "to them gave he the *power to become* the sons of God." Sanctification, therefore, in that sense of the word, in which it implies the communication of the means of attaining unto real holiness of life; sanctification in that sense of the word, in which it implies the reception of the power by which, if diligently used, we may be enabled to fulfil the precepts of the Gospel, and live soberly, and righteously, and godly, in this present world; sanctification, in this restricted sense of the word, cannot be separated from the grace of justification, of which, in fact, it is a necessary consequence; a part of the same merciful system, which has been ordained for the pupose of making us meet to be partakers

of the inheritance of the saints in light. We maintain, therefore, that as in the *first*, so also in the *second* birth, those who pass from a state of darkness into light, by being reconciled to God, through Christ, who is the light of the spiritual world, receive at the same time the means of continuing their existence in that state into which they are introduced. For, without the reception of those means, atonement would dwindle into a valueless name, and reconciliation be degraded into the mere shadow of a blessing.

Now, both this justification and this sanctification, which constitute the essence and, according to our view of the subject form the definition of the second birth, are expressly attributed in the Scriptures of truth, to the influence and operation of the Holy Ghost. Sanctification unto obedience, that is, for the purpose of enabling us to attain unto obedience, St. Peter ascribes to the Spirit (1 Pet. i. 2); and "ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified," says St. Paul, (1 Cor. vi. 11.) "in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." To be "born again," therefore, when under the idea of that second birth, we include the reception of justification for the past, and the means of sanctification for the future, is in reality to be "born again of the *Spirit*," because he is the principal agent in the production of the salutary change.

Spiritual regeneration, therefore, in the sense which we have thus ventured to assign to it, ultimately resolves itself into the remission of sins, and the power of the Spirit to perform our duty. Spiritual regeneration thus becomes, in fact, equivalent to the *wholesome* operation of baptism; and it was principally with a view to the present question, that we entered so largely into the consideration of the nature and the degree of the efficacy of that sacrament, and the subjects upon whom its blessings would be conferred. We have only now to recal to our remembrance the principles which we laboured to establish in our former enquiries, to determine at once both the persons and period in which regeneration takes place. We have only to admit, that the administration of baptism communicates to every *worthy* recipient the remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Ghost; in order to be convinced, that whoever is *worthily* born again of *water*, is *actually* born again of the *Spirit*. We have only then to admit further, that every innocent and incapable infant, and every penitent and believing adult, is to be accounted a worthy recipient; in order to be convinced, that every innocent and incapable infant, and every penitent and believing adult is, in reality, regenerated at the time and through the medium of his baptism. They may have lived, and moved, and had their

spiritual being, even before they were baptised, and so it is with every being before he is born. But it was not a being in the same measure, or of the same character, or under the same form. They had not then absolutely passed from a state of darkness into light, and, consequently, could not be said to have absolutely "come to the birth," or to have completed the act of their spiritual regeneration.

The *spiritual second birth* is therefore synonimous with *baptismal regeneration;* and that being "born again," without which our Saviour in the 3d verse declares, no man can see the kingdom of God, is but one and the same thing with the "being born of water and of the Spirit," with the union of the elemental and spiritual birth, which, in the 5th verse, he declares to be equally indispensable to salvation. Indispensable however it is, not absolutely and to *every* individual, but to every one who is placed under similar circumstances with Nicodemus. It is necessary only to every one, who has an *opportunity* of knowing and understanding the obligation. and submitting to the administration of the ceremonial ordinance. And this is a necessity which, being limited in its application according to the powers of the subject, excludes from the hopes of happiness in heaven neither the infant or the idiot.

Such is the definition we have ventured to assign to the term; such the views we have been led to form of the nature, and the intent, the objects, and the period of the occurrence of baptismal regeneration. And that these views are consistent in every particular with the language and sentiments of the Church, to which we belong, it is almost unnecessary to mention. She distinctly pronounces, that every infant who is baptised, is "regenerated of the Spirit," in the very act, and as the effect of his baptism. She explains this spiritual regeneration in her Catechism, when considered as the universal effect of baptism upon infants, to be "a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness." This death unto sin she subsequently interprets, as corresponding to our deliverance from that "wrath which was due unto the sin in which we were born," i. e. as a remission of the guilt of the original sin. That "new birth unto righteousness," she declares to be equivalent to being "made the children of grace." But that she regards this grace as only the means of *enabling* us to attain unto holiness of life, and not as *necessarily* the parent of final perseverance and everlasting salvation, is sufficiently evident from every part of her proceedings.

She prays, and she commands every one to pray, in her baptismal service, that the child,

whom she has announced as regenerate of the Holy Ghost, " *may* crucify the old man, and utterly abolish the whole body of sin, and *may* lead the rest of his life according to this beginnining; that, as he is made partaker of the death of Christ, he *may* also be partaker of his resurrection, and so finally may become an inheritor of God's everlasting kingdom." These are her solemn and her constant prayers; and in her prayers, of course, she prays only for things which *may not* take place, for contingent and uncertain blessings. Holiness of life, therefore, she does not regard as the inevitable consequence of baptismal regeneration. Again, whilst in her Catechism, she teaches the child himself to thank his heavenly Father, that " he *hath* called him to this state of salvation;" she teaches him also to " pray unto God, that he would give him his grace to continue in the same unto his life's end." These are her instructions; and she therefore instructs us to believe, that the grace of salvation and perseverance, which is communicated in baptism, is not absolutely communicated as an indefectible grace, but may be lost by the folly or the wickedness of the child. These plain and positive expressions of her formularies, and the harsh and unnatural interpretations, which those who have adopted a different hypothesis, have been compelled to assign to many of her most

explicit declarations, are a powerful and persuasive argument to convince us of the correspondence of our own opinions, with those of her to whose authority we bow. Or were there any difficulty remaining in the question, it would be completely removed by the plain and candid statement of the doctrine of the Liturgy, which has been delivered by a learned Professor in a sister University *.

To this statement, however, of the doctrine of regeneration, there is one objection of considerable importance, which it would be improper to leave altogether without answer or remark. The communication of the Spirit to every infant in the period of baptism, is considered by many as positively contradicted by experience and facts.

Few it is said of those who are baptised in infancy fulfil the duties of their calling, or give any visible signs of the seed of grace which has been sown in their hearts in the administration of the sacrament; and it is supposed to be an inconceivable, if not an impossible circumstance, that the Spirit should prove inefficacious to the production of real holiness of life in such a

* Dr. Lawrence, Regius Professor of Hebrew in the University of Oxford, in his "Doctrine of the Church of England upon the Efficacy of Baptism;" but I refer more especially to the eighth Chapter.

majority of instances. The statement is, perhaps, exaggerated. But at any rate if we can produce a cause which may account for this effect, in that degree in which it does exist, the wonder and the difficulty must cease at once.

Now much of the evil may be undoubtedly referred to a *wilful* falling away from grace, and a wilful neglect in the improvement of the spiritual gift which has been received. Like the Jews they are "stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart;" not because they have not *received*, but because they have "always *resisted*, the Holy Ghost." (Acts vii. 51.) But in addition to this, we may observe, that when our Saviour commanded his disciples to "go forth and baptise all nations," he commanded them, at the same time, to follow up the rite, by teaching the baptised "to observe all things whatsoever he had commanded them."

This therefore is one of the essential parts of the commission of Jesus to his ministers, and if we can point out any generally existing failure in its fulfilment, we shall have sufficiently accounted for the general deficiency of the fruits of the Spirit, in the sentiments and conduct of the children of Christian parents, who have received the power of the Spirit in their baptism. If those who are baptised be not *brought up* in the

nurture and admonition of the Lord, we can no longer be astonished that they do not *grow up* in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

It cannot be denied that the duty of instructing, as well as the office of baptising those who are admitted into the visible Church, is lodged, by the terms of our Saviour's parting commission to the Apostles, in the hands of the ministry. But it would be impossible for the ministers of the Gospel, however numerous or diligent, individually, to superintend the religious education of every Christian child. The only thing which it is in the power of the Church to do, she has done. She has established a system of *general* instruction. She has enjoined her ministers to be frequent and regular in the labour of catechising. She will not depend upon the mere promises and declarations of the parents alone, for the godly education of the child to be baptised, but requires in every case that they should bring three persons, at the least, of holy and Christian characters, as security for their fidelity in the discharge of their parental duties—persons who, in case of death, incapacity, or neglect, may supply to the child the place of its natural guardians in the care of the soul, and be unto it as a nursing father, or a nursing mother, in all spiritual things.

This is the solemn duty undertaken by every

one who appears as a sponsor at the baptismal font. But how are these duties fulfilled? The carelessness and indifference with which parents often procure the rite to be administered to their offspring. The little importance which they attach to the choice of proper sponsors, choosing them rather from compliment and convenience, than from any real interest which they think they will take in the welfare of the child. The ignorance which these godfathers and godmothers almost universally display of the nature of the engagements into which they are entering: and the indolence and neglect which we have so often to lament in those who are better acquainted with their duties, form altogether a scene as disgraceful as it is pernicious to the cause of the Gospel.

It is here, then, that we are to look for the root of the evil; and not by trenching upon the general efficacy of a Christian sacrament, or denying the Spirit to be its accompaniment.

Fearful lest she should present to her Lord an unworthy offering*, or seem negligent in the per-

* The promise of the sureties that the children baptized shall perform the conditions required, when they are able to do so, is the reason only why children *are*, not why they *may be* baptised; the reason only why it is *expedient*, not why it is *lawful*; the reason only why the Church permits herself,

formance of her holy function, the Church makes every effort in her power to give to her offspring a moral and religious education. But those to whom she delegates her authority are careless of the work. The task "of teaching them to observe whatsoever Jesus has commanded them," is not fulfilled, and therefore his commandments are not observed. For if a child were trained in the way he should go, assuredly the blessing of God would attend the training, and he would seldom, when grown old in understanding, depart therefrom. But though the tree be good, yet if it be left neglected and unpruned, its vigour will shoot only into a barren luxuriance. The soil may be good, and good seed be sown upon the land, but if the husbandman watch not, the enemy will sow tares. The cause of the evil, therefore, arises not from the defective operation of the Spirit in the sacrament, but from the defective co-operation of man therewith; from a want of co-operation either in those who are to teach, or in those who are to be taught. Where the whole of the baptismal commission is not carefully performed and duly improved, it

not why she is permitted by the Gospel to do so. Were the stipulation of the sponsors, the foundation of the *legality* of infant baptism, sponsors would also have been required in the *private* baptism of infants.

would be in vain to look for the fulness of the benefit.

The doctrine then which we maintain is simply this. That elemental and spiritual regeneration, in the sense we have assigned to that term, viz. as comprehending the remission of sin and the power of the Spirit, to fulfil their Christian duties, are to be considered as forming *universally*, in the case of infants, the constituent parts of *baptismal* regeneration. And this doctrine we maintain, confident that no evil and immoral consequences can justly be drawn from its admission as a truth, and fearless of any false and delusive hopes which the wickedness of man might be inclined to build upon so godly a foundation. It is filled with no danger to the souls of men, it administers no opiate unto the carnal mind. It is naturally and fairly liable to no greater degree of corruption than any of the other mercies of God. For what if we be taught that we who once were darkness, are now, through the power of our baptism, made light in the Lord? Why, verily, if we will condescend to be taught by the wisdom of an Apostle, and build the conclusion of St. Paul upon the premises of St. Paul, we must acknowledge that this is but a stronger reason why we should learn and labour to "walk as the children of light," lest we should fall back into our former state of

irremediable darkness, where the administration of no redeeming ordinance will again avail to reanimate the spark of hope.

What if we be taught, that in our baptism, we did all "drink into one Spirit," and were all made partakers of the grace of holiness? Shall we then do despite unto this Spirit received, and continue wilfully in sin that grace may abound? I speak again the language of the Apostle, and say, "God forbid." Surely if we have received in baptism, sanctification, through the Spirit, unto obedience, it is but a stronger reason why we should employ the Spirit in the works of obedience, and use the means for the attainment of the end. If the Spirit be given us in baptism, "to profit withal," it is but the greater encouragement to give all heed and diligence that we *may* profit withal; and a greater cause of fear lest through negligence we should fail in the attainment of salvation. For still I think that I speak the language of the Apostle, when I say, that the Spirit only "helpeth our infirmities," that the Spirit may be grieved, and resisted, and quenched. And though it be true that even where a Paul does plant, and an Apollos does water, it is still God only who does give the increase; yet we know and believe it to be equally true, that though a Paul should have planted in us the seed of holiness in baptism,

God will not give the increase thereto, if the indolence of man refuse or neglect to water the seed. However highly then we may exalt the spiritual privileges of baptism, what possible evil can be done to religion or morality, what fair excuse afforded to the careless and profane, so long as we conclude with the Gospel, that "neither circumcision availeth any thing to everlasting happiness, nor uncircumcision without the new creature," without a real sanctification of heart and life.

What danger can arise so long as we conclude, that neither the grace of baptism availeth any thing to salvation, nor the want of that grace, but "faith working by love;" but faith made energetic and effectual by the works of holiness, and crowned with the qualifications of virtue, knowledge, meekness, gentleness, patience, brotherly kindness, and all goodness, and universal charity. Why, what evil have we done in declaring, baptism to be "the power of God unto salvation," so long as we be not negligent to put men in remembrance of their duty, and to tell them that the cause without the effect is dead; that the gift without the fruits of the Spirit is vain; to warn them lest they should forget that they have been "purged from their sins;" and to exhort them, as a consequence, "to give all diligence to make their calling and election sure:"

Believing, though we believe, that by reason of the hypocrisy of our century, the Lord alone works in us both to will and to do, yet since all we receive, that he is accepting alone upon whom depends the working out of our own salvation. Thus hypocrisy, we were "born again into a living hope of an inheritance, reserved in heaven for them, who are kept by the power of God." Being hypocrisy, we were endued with "power to become the sons of God."

But what is it to a power which may be neglected, or resisted, or lost. For from a careless and perverse and wicked generation, we shall not be kept by the power of God unto salvation, and so all the promises of our hope will become void, and take away under the pressure of our iniquities. This is the representation which we provide; and though it be in the form a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness, we cannot turn from the preaching of this mysterious doctrine; because we believe it to be justified by the analogy of the first and the second birth, to be founded upon the oracles of God, to be in strict consistency with the history of the Church, and to be only adversary to the interests of religion in others.

because, though we believe, that by reason of the baptism of our infancy, the Lord doth work in us both to will and to do, yet after all we confess, that it is ourselves alone upon whom depends the working out of our own salvation. Being baptised, we were "born again into a lively hope of an inheritance, reserved in heaven for them who are kept by the power of God." Being baptised, we were endued with "power to become the sons of God."

But then it is a power which may be neglected, or abused, or lost. But then if careless and perverse, and without perseverance, we shall *not* be kept by the power of God unto salvation, and so all the liveliness of our hope will become dead, and fade away before the presence of our iniquities. This is the regeneration which we preach; and though it be to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness, we cannot cease from the preaching of this regeneration; because we believe it to be justified by the analogy of the first and the second birth, to be founded upon the oracles of God, to be in strict conformity with the Liturgy of the Church, and in no way subversive of the interests of religion or virtue.

DISCOURSE V.

THE NATURE OF BAPTISMAL REGENERATION CONTINUED.

JOHN iii. 3. 5.

Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

DEDUCING our opinions from a careful examination into the analogy which our Saviour has declared to subsist between the nature of the first and the second birth, and fortified in our conclusions by an appeal to the standard of our faith, as members and ministers of the Established Church, we have been induced to assign to the spiritual regeneration of baptism, a definition, which makes it co-extensive with the blessings of that sacrament, and comprehends the *reception* of the remission of sins, and the power of the Spirit to perform our Christian duties. If ex-

amined upon the ground of the formularies of our Church, and the analogy of our Saviour alone, this sense of the term would seem to be unexceptionably correct, because it explains the second and spiritual birth, in a sense in which every birth must be ultimately explained, the passage of a being, from a state of darkness, into light*, and, what the learned Hooker has justly described, as "the first *apparent* commencement of life."

But is that the sense in which regeneration is taken in the Scriptures of truth? Is that the sense in which, from the scanty information they have left us upon the point, it would seem to have been contemplated by the Apostles themselves? This is an enquiry of the most vital importance, because though as ministers we are

* The error of interpreting regeneration, exclusively, in the sense of the commencement of a real change of life, seems to have arisen from interpreting "darkness" and "light," exclusively in the sense of wickedness and righteousness, and consequently a passage frem a state of darkness into light, as an actual transition from a sinful to a virtuous course of life. But Schleusner well observes that σκοτια, implies also "omnis status ac conditio hominum ante conversionem ad religionem Christianam;"—φως "omnis status et conditio hominum qui verâ fide ampleni sunt religionem Christianam:" and consequently a passage from darkness into light signifies a passage from one of those states to the other.

bound to conform to the doctrines of the Church to which we belong, yet as Christians we are bound to withdraw from the communion of that Church, whenever we are thoroughly and clearly convinced that the fundamental doctrines of her creed are either subversive of morality, or repugnant to the authoritative declarations of the Gospel. Here then we must again resume our labours, and endeavour to establish the conformity of our opinions with the language of revelation.

Except in the conversation of our Saviour with Nicodemus, the precise expression of being born, or begotten *again*, occurs but twice throughout the whole of the New Testament; and in one of those passages alone can we find any materials for determining its signification. St. Peter opens his first Epistle, to the strangers scattered throughout Asia, by addressing them in the second verse, as "elect, according to the foreknowledge of God, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ;" that is, as persons, who through the sacrifice of Christ, had obtained the forgiveness of sins, and the means of holiness, through the gift of the Holy Ghost.

He then, immediately, proceeds in the following verse to return thanks to the Almighty, for the grace and privileges which were thus enjoyed

by them and by himself, and says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, of his abundant mercies, hath begotten, or made us to be born *again*, unto a lively hope." Here it is evident, that the expression of being "born again, unto a lively hope," is equivalent to that sanctification through the Spirit, and that justification through the atonement of Jesus, of which he had in the former verse pronounced that they had been made partakers in their election.

The reception of pardon and the communication and confirmation of grace, constituted, therefore, as it were, the very substance of regeneration in the mind of this Apostle; a pardon, however, which would be continued only upon the condition of future obedience, grace only in such a measure as *might* lead, if duly cherished and improved, to the acquisition of real and personal holiness. For had St. Peter's thoughts been otherwise,—had he considered the being "born again," as an entire change of mind, and of all the faculties, as a radical change of heart and the *necessary* commencement of actual sanctification, he would have moulded his expressions in a very different form, and instead of temperately speaking of a lively *hope*, would have boldly asserted that we were absolutely begotten again unto an inalienable *assurance* of the sal-

vation of our souls. St. Peter, therefore, would appear, like us, to have understood our Saviour's expression of "being born again," in the sense of being pardoned and assisted by the influence of the Spirit, and as these blessings are universally conferred upon every worthy recipient of baptism, it would appear also to be the doctrine of St. Peter, that every worthy recipient is *so* regenerated at the time, and through the medium of his baptism, *that* baptism which he has told us in another place, "doth save us," if we bring with us the answer of a good conscience before God.

But we may be told, in opposition to this interpretation, that whatever may be the conclusion to which we are led by the language of St. Peter, the language of the other Apostles is altogether different. We may be reminded, perhaps, that though the phrase of being born *again* is very seldom used, the corresponding phrase of being born of *God*, is frequently to be found in the pages of St. John; that he is to be considered as the best interpreter of that saying of our Saviour, which he alone amongst the Apostles has thought fit to record, and that he has spoken of the change in a manner, which is utterly irreconcileable with the opinions we have formed.

Three distinct species of texts have been produced for this purpose. By the first, it is attempted to be shown, that regeneration may, in

the case of adults, precede; by the second, that in the case of infants, it may not accompany the administration of baptism; and by the third, that this sacrament cannot, properly speaking, be considered as the means of procuring for us the reception of that blessing.

Let us proceed, therefore, to the examination of these texts.

1. "Every one that doeth *righteousness*, is born of God." "Every one that *loveth*, is born of God." "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God." From these plain and explicit passages in the first General Epistle of St. John, it has been concluded, with a considerable degree of plausibility, that *every* individual in every nation under heaven, who is endued with the qualifications of faith, and holiness, and charity, is already born again of the Spirit. No matter whether he have received, or even heard of the sacrament of baptism, if he be a believer, and a lover, and a doer of righteousness, it is maintained, that from that circumstance alone, we are authorised by St. John, in pronouncing him to be a partaker of spiritual regeneration. But it is evident, that in the deduction of this inference, one necessary and indispensable rule of interpretation has been entirely overlooked. The rule to which I allude is this: that every universal proposition is to be limited in its application by the

circumstances of the individuals to whom it is addressed, and the object the writer has in view. Now those alone, to whom the Epistle of St. John was written, were those who did "*believe* on the name of the Son of God," and therefore we may certainly conclude, had been *baptised* into his name. Christians they were both by inward faith and outward profession. "Whosoever believeth, and loveth, and doeth righteousness, is born of God," was addressed to the members of the Christian Church *alone;* and no one is a member of that Church, who has not been baptised. These texts, therefore, would appear *indeed* to prove, that every baptised Christian, who believeth, and loveth, and doeth righteousness, is born of God; but not having been spoken to those who are *without* the pale of the Church, cannot fairly be considered as applicable to them. They are descriptions indeed of what those are and do, who *remain* in the state in which they were placed by baptism; but it is a perversion of their original intention to apply them to the *un*-baptised. Delineations they are of those, who are bringing forth the fruits of regeneration; *criteria,* by which the baptised alone are to judge of their state; tests, whereby not every human, but only every *Christian,* being may judge whether he is born of God, so as to abide and continue in the light into which he was introduced by baptism.

For, that the phrase of "being born of God," in St. John, is to be interpreted only of a *continuance* in actual holiness, we shall now proceed to shew.

2. "Whatsoever is born of God, overcometh the world." "Whosoever is born of God, sinneth not." From these, and from similar texts in the same Epistle, it has been argued as before, and with equal plausibility, that as multitudes who have been baptised in infancy, do neither overcome the world, nor continue free from the influence of habitual sin, they are not "born of God" We admit the propriety of the conclusion, but then we limit its application according to the sense of the Apostle; and we observe, that the whole force of the argument, as it is an argument against the universal regeneration of infants in baptism, depends upon the meaning assigned to the expression of "being born of God." The argument does *not* prove, that those persons, who have been baptised in their infancy, have not been "born *again*," in the sense which we have ascribed to that phrase in the mouth of our Saviour and St. Peter, unless it can be shewn, that to be "born of *God*," in St. John, is an exactly corresponding phrase. But what says St. John? "In this the children of God are manifest. Whosoever is born of God, sinneth not." To be born of God, and to be the children of God, are

L. 6 & 7 – I find that Tillotson in his 15th
Sermon, in explaining the 1st & 2nd verses of
St John, agrees with me upon the meaning
of the phrases "children of God" & "sons of God"
regarding there as numerous terms &
explaining children of God to be the
devil to be good & bad men, those who
are led by the Spirit of God or of the world.
Aug. 1818.

consequently the same. This is universally allowed. But what says St. Paul? "As many as are *led* by the Spirit of God, they are the children of God." (Rom. viii. 14.) To be children of God, and born of God, and led by or continuing in the Spirit of God, are therefore convertible terms. The language of the Apostle will therefore mean, that if we be led by the Spirit, and bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, we shall not habitually commit sin; a proposition which no one will deny. And hence we conclude, that the texts now under consideration do not refer to the *communication* of a *principle* of holiness, but to our *continuance* in a *state* of holiness, by the due cultivation of the implanted seed of grace.

But it may be, and it has been objected, that the word of the Apostle will scarce admit of this interpretation, and that γεγεννηται (chap. iii. 9.) "*hath been* born of God," would seem to refer to times past, rather than to times present; to what was, rather than to what is, and so to deny, that any one who commits sin has *ever* been born of God. But whatever grammatical ambiguity there may be in the tense which the Apostle has used, surely he may be permitted to remove the ambiguity for himself, and explain his own meaning in his own unexceptionable language. If then we turn back to the 6th verse of the iiid chapter, we shall find, that what he in the 4th verse

predicates of those who are *born* of God, he had there *first* of all predicated of those who *abide* in God. "Whosoever *abideth* in God, sinneth not," says he there. "Whosoever is *born* of God, sinneth not," says he *here*. To be, or to have been born of God, is consequently in St. John, synonymous with *abiding* in God and godliness; and his object in stating these propositions was to guard his flock against those deceitful men, who taught them, that even without the practice of good works, the anointing which St. John allows they had received (ii. 27.), would be effectual to salvation. No, says he, "If we say, that we have fellowship with God, and continue to walk in darkness, we are liars." For, whosoever abideth in God, or is born of God, sinneth not; for, if he abideth in him, his seed remaineth in him, and he cannot habitually sin, because he is thus born of God. "To be "born of *God*," with St. John, and to be "born *again*," with our Saviour and St. Peter, are not, therefore, terms of exactly the same import, and, consequently, the definition we have given of baptismal regeneration is not at all affected by arguments which may be founded upon a presumption of their identity.

3. The third ground upon which baptism is denied to be the means of regeneration, is because it is ascribed in Scripture to other causes.

" Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth," says St. James (i. 18.). " Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God," says St. Peter (i. 23.). The conclusion, which has been built upon these passages, declares, that by mentioning the " word of God," the sacred writers expressly exclude the water of baptism from being, in any sense, a means of the regeneration of man. But a very slight consideration may serve to shew the weakness of the argument. Indeed, if admitted, as correct, it would directly contradict the words of St. Peter, and contrary to the positive declaration of that Apostle, that we are " begotten again unto a lively hope by the *resurrection* of Jesus," and contrary to the positive of St. Paul, that we " are all the children of God by *faith* in Jesus Christ" (Gal. iii. 26.), would absolutely exclude both the resurrection and the faith of Jesus from any participation in the work of regeneration. The real fact, however is, that the Scriptures attribute the sanctification and salvation of individuals, and the Church, to the concurring operation of several causes; each of which is possessed of a certain, though perhaps very different, weight and share in the completion of the general result. " We are saved by faith," says St. Paul (Ephes. ii. 8.); but that this specification of faith does not prevent the efficacy and necessity of

baptism in the production of the same end, is evident from St. Peter, who has told us, that "baptism also does save us" (iii. 21.), as well as faith. So long, therefore, as we find the waters of baptism to be styled by an Apostle "the laver of regeneration," and so long as we shall read in the pages of the New Testament (Ephes. v. 26.), that Jesus "has sanctified and cleansed," or, in one word, regenerated "his Church with the washing of water," as well as the word, we need not scruple to designate baptism as one of the *means* of regeneration, or *causes*, without the presence of which it cannot, in general, take place; notwithstanding those passages, in which it would seem to be ascribed to the power of the word alone. Both are, in some sense, the means, and both have their appropriate share in the production of the effect. The word makes known to us the terms of the covenant; and baptism, by making us members of the covenant, places us under the influence of those terms.

The observations to which the enquiry has thus given rise, will, I trust, sufficiently establish the consistency of our opinions with the language of Holy Writ, and shew, that there is no impropriety in considering baptismal regeneration to be the communication (to every infant and worthy recipient) of the remission of sin, and the power of the Spirit to perform their Christian duties;

the communication of a principle, by the diligent use of which they *may* attain unto holiness, but not necessarily the commencement of a state of actual and progressive sanctification *. But this is not the only advantage which we may derive from the investigation. It may serve also, in a great measure, to point out to us the origin of that apparent difference of opinion, which may be found even in the pages of our older Divines, and which, perhaps, may be considered as one of the principal causes of that unhappy dissension, which prevails at present among the Ministers of the Church.

Speaking without any direct or intentional reference to the ordinance of baptism, employed only in framing a just description of the "new creature" of St. Paul, whose "faith worketh by love," and who consequently "keeps the commandments of God;" and considering regeneration as the *continuance* of a state, in which there is not only the presence, but the "prevalence of grace." Archbishop Tillotson, in his Sermons on

* I cannot help bearing testimony to the soundness of the views upon regeneration, contained in two short pamphlets addressed by Dean Bethell to Mr. Faber, and to which I feel much indebted. It is much to be lamented, that the Dean of Chichester has not favoured the world with his sentiments upon the subject in a more extended and systematic form.

the subject, (Serm. 106 to 110) has defined it to be "the real renovation of our hearts and lives," and the compleat and progressive "change from a state of disobedience and sin, to a state of obedience and holiness." He has identified it with actual, and entire, and continued sanctification of heart and life, and has therefore, very naturally, delivered his sentiments in terms which necessarily preclude the possibility of its being considered, in that sense of the term, to be the universal concomitant of infant baptism. The eloquent wisdom of Jeremy Taylor, on the contrary, with a firmer grasp of his subject, and perhaps a higher reach of understanding, speaking expressly of the sacrament of baptism*, speaks of it with his usual force and felicity of expression, as doing the infancy of the work of grace, as bringing us but to the birth of the new life, and, though communicating the Spirit of God, yet in such a manner alone, that it *may* be ineffective or inactive. He therefore considers *every* child to be regenerated in baptism; and of the regenerated person, he says, "now that he is born anew, he hath in him that principle of holiness, which, *if it be cherished* (and upon that single limitation the solution of the whole controversy depends,) will grow up to life, to life eternal†." But it

* Taylor's Life of Christ, Disc. vi. Part 2. Sect. 8. and 16.
† Ibid. Disc. vi. Part 1. Sect. 23.

would be endless to reconcile the differences which may be found in almost every writer. I shall, therefore, confine my attention to the works of one single individual. Every one, who has studied the controversy of regeneration, must have remarked, that the name of the pious and learned Bishop Beveridge has been claimed with equal confidence by both parties in the contest. Two Sermons exist from the pen of this Divine; in the first of which (Serm. 19), it is his professed intention, to describe the marks of the "new creture," or of the man, whose "faith worketh by love;" in the other (Serm. 35 *), to shew in what

* I would strongly recommend the perusal of this Sermon to those, who are studying the present controversy upon regeneration. It contains expressions certainly unguarded, and apparently objectionable. It asserts, that "there is no other way of being born again of water, as well as of the Spirit, but only in the sacrament of baptism." It declares, that "the Spirit of Christ certainly accompanies the sacrament of baptism, when duly *administered* according to his institution," without taking any notice of the qualifications of the recipient. But these propositions, when corrected, as in fairness they ought to be, by his subsequent limitations, are perfectly plain and unexceptionable. And had the similar propositions of Dr. Mant been accepted with those allowances, which common sense and common candour might have perceived to be necessary; the language of that Divine might have been spoken of as not sufficiently definite or precise; but his doctrines would never have been so severely censured, as immoral and unscriptural.

manner, " admission into the Church of Christ, by baptism, is necessary to salvation. In the former, it is his object to prevent in nominal Christians an unfounded reliance upon the mere reception of baptism; in the latter, to explain and establish the use and the dignity of that sacrament. As might reasonably be expected from the different nature of the subjects of which they treat, there are passages, with regard to regeneration, which would appear to be contradictory and inconsistent with each other. In the first of these Sermons he positively asserts, that, " if born again of God, men must needs become new creatures, and *lead new lives*," because he had before explained this regeneration in a sense synonimous with real, and actual, and continued holiness, and supposed them " to be *so* renewed and born again of God's Holy Spirit, that they were become new men, their minds purified, their consciences purged from bad works, and their whole soul inflamed with love to God." In one word, he had supposed them " to be born of God," in the sense of St. John, and therefore " abiding in God." But when, in the other discourse, he comes to the consideration of the regeneration of *baptism*, he describes *it* exactly in the manner, and almost in the terms, in which we have interpreted the " being born *again*," of our Saviour; and St. Peter, " He that is born of the Spirit of God,"

says he, " thereby becomes a spiritual creature, and so is capable of those spiritual things, of which the kingdom of God consisteth, even of righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. But that we may be thus born of the Spirit, we must be born also of water, which our Saviour puts in the first place. Not as if there was any such virtue in water, whereby it could regenerate us; but because this is the rite or ordinance appointed by Christ, *wherein* to regenerate us by this Holy Spirit." Therefore he concludes, that " when we were baptised, we were born of the water *and* the Spirit, *so* as to have the seed of grace sown in our hearts, sufficient to *enable* us to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, to overcome temptations, to believe aright in God our Saviour, and obey and serve him faithfully all the days of our life. And, if we afterwards live in good conscience towards God, we shall certainly be saved through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But, if we neglect to perform what we then promised, we shall certainly perish." " When we were baptised," says he, " we were born of the Spirit, and so have it always *ready* to assist us."

I have quoted these passages from this venerable author, to shew, that regeneration may be taken in senses distinct from each other, and to teach men to be very cautious in the use of such passages, and carefully to examine in what sense

the term is used; whether for the communication of the principle of obedience*, or to the continuance of a state of real sanctification; before they presume to determine, that regeneration is, by any writer, either asserted or denied to be the universal concomitant of infant baptism.

Why then should not men cease for ever from this almost war of words, and let there be peace at least *within* the walls of our Jerusalem. Her bulwarks indeed are mighty, but her enemies also are many; and if she be divided against herself she cannot stand. If her watchmen wake only to contend amongst themselves, and despise the presence and the number of her adversaries without, no regard for her strength, no reverence for her beauty will restrain their efforts, or preserve her from a fall. If she desert herself, she will be forsaken of her God. Why then should not the city of our Jerusalem be as a city that is at unity in itself? The principles of harmony would appear to be obvious and easy to all, who have no private views to answer, and no private systems to defend, and may be drawn, as I conceive, with readiness even from that imperfect statement of the subject, which these discourses afford.

* It would have been tedious to have repeated, upon every occasion, the *whole* description we have given of regeneration. I have therefore, in general, only mentioned the point of *difference*.

For the conclusion, to which we have been ultimately conducted in the progress, and as the result of our enquiries, may be comprehended in a very few and simple words. It is this, that regeneration both may be, and has been, described by Divines under two different forms; first, as that reception of grace in baptism, which gives us the power of becoming the sons of God; and secondly, as that "growth in grace," that use of the means so received, by which we actually become the sons of God, in real, and continued, and progressive holiness of heart and life. In the former, it is considered as an *act;* an act of God, infusing his Spirit into the soul, in an insensible manner, and not irresistible degree, for the purpose of enduing it with the capability of attaining unto piety and virtue. In the latter, it is regarded as a *state*, as that abiding state of righteousness and sanctification, unto which we have actually attained by the diligent improvement of the powers and capabilities we have received. In the former of these senses, it is adopted in the doctrinal formularies of our Church, in her authorized Catechism, and in her Baptismal Services; and in this sense it ought universally to be accepted, when we speak with a reference to the effects of baptism, and the nature of *baptismal* regeneration. In the latter of these senses it might seem, perhaps, to have been interpreted in one of her practical treatises. For, in the first part of the Ho-

mily for Whitsunday, where she is speaking of "the power of the Holy Ghost to regenerate men," she explains her meaning, like Bishop Beveridge, by saying, that to regenerate men is, "as it were, to bring them forth anew, *so* that they shall be nothing like the men they were before." And after this, she immediately proceeds to lay down the evidences by which a Christian may know, "whether the Holy Ghost *dwelleth* within him." She does not consider the want of the fruits of the Spirit, as any certain proof of our never having received the Spirit, but, with a direct reference to those tests and criteria, which St. John, in his first Epistle, has produced as the proofs of our being "born of God," so as to "abide in God," she proceeds to give us "a glass, wherein we may discern whether we *have* (not have had) the Holy Ghost within us; whether we *are* (not have been) endued with the Holy Ghost."

Yet, when we consider, that this latter production was not drawn up by the same individual, or with the same views which dictated the language of the Office for the Baptism of Infants; and that it was probably not the intention of the Author of the Homily for Whitsunday to speak in the terms of a strict theological definition, but only to give godly and profitable instruction to the people, and that the word "regenerate," seems only to have been incidentally used by him, as synoni-

mous with "sanctify." When we consider further, that the Liturgy has so strictly and inalienably attached regeneration to baptism, as its effect upon infants, that it would be impossible, without a complete revision and alteration of the whole, to detach the term from that sacrament; and when we add to these considerations, the confusion, which must always and necessarily spring from an application of the same word indifferently to two distinct, though connected subjects, I leave it to the good sense and candour of every Minister to decide what is the course most proper to be pursued. I ask, whether it would not be more wise to confine the use of the words *regenerate* and *regeneration*, exclusively, to the benefits resulting from *baptism*, to every worthy recipient; and, when we wish to exhort our congregations to examine their state with regard to religion *, to preach, like Beveridge and Tillotson, only from those texts which speak of the "new creature," whose "faith working by love," produces "an obedience to the commandments of God," and to make use of the fruits of the Spirit, only after the manner and in the language of St. John, as tests, not of those who have been regenerated by the sowing in their hearts of the seed

* See this subject very beautifully touched upon in the impressive primary Charge of the Bishop of Gloucester p. 19 to 24.

of grace, but of those "whose seed remaineth in them," not of those who *have been* born *again*, but of those who *are* born of God, "and abiding in God." So might we, I think, at once preserve both the harmony of our doctrine, and the power of our preaching.

But I am weary of wandering in the wilderness of controversy. The path of polemics is a path of difficulty and thorns. To walk therein can bring no pleasure to a pious or a peaceful mind; and few can persevere in the pursuit of its intricacies, and the contemplation of its acrimony, without finding his charity within him to dwindle, and his spirit within him to fail. Suffer us then to think, that we have spoken the language of our Divines, of our Church, and of our Bible; that we have maintained the doctrine of the Liturgy and of Scripture. And if scriptural, it must be practical.

Turn we then, for one single moment, to examine what those practical inferences are, to which this doctrine of *baptismal* regeneration leads.

If we have spoken the truth, every one here has been born again of the Spirit. As infants, they were brought by the piety of their parents to the fountain of life, to the cleansing waters of healing and of baptism, and passing through the laver of regeneration, were there and then regenerated by the Holy Ghost. They have all received the

new and spiritual *birth.* But are they all living the new and spiritual *life?* Many that are born do die, and never reach that maturity of strength, and those powers of body and of mind, for the attainment and the use of which they are born into the world. Many that are born do die, some in infancy and some in youth, some in folly and some in pride, and many through the neglect, and many through the abuse, of their faculties, do linger out a wretched and diseased existence without vigour, without health, and without hope. It is the same too in the spiritual life, and the analogy may still be continued with a mournful truth. Many have been born *again* who, as spiritual creatures, are dying or are dead. Of all that were brought to the waters of baptism, of all the filth of whose flesh has been washed away, and into whom the principle of godliness has been infused, and the power of becoming the sons of God been given; how few there be, that in the hour of life that now is, in the hour of death that shall be, and in the day of judgement that must be, will be able to bring the answer of a good conscience before God! All have been born *again,* but all are not born of *God,* or abiding in God. All have been regenerated, but all are not now regenerate; and their spiritual life remaineth not, or flourisheth not in them. Some are buried

in sins, and some have fallen asleep in negligence. Some in carelessness, and some in wickedness, and some in violence, have checked, or weakened, or, perchance, have quenched the principle of light and love. And many there be, who, through indolence, perverseness, or contempt, are no more than very children in holiness still;—still tottering in the weakness and helplessness of spiritual infancy. They have never duly cherished and improved the means of growing in grace, and so have never attained unto the perfect man, or reached "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." For the seed of holiness, that is sown in our hearts in baptism, may so decay, or die for want of cultivation, as either to bring forth no fruit at all, or no fruit unto perfection. Examine therefore yourselves brethren, whether, after having been born unto God, ye live unto God; whether, the Spirit having been given you to profit withal, ye, according to the measure of that Spirit, have worked withal. The Spirit indeed worketh when and how it listeth, and we know not when or how. But we know its power, and we know its effects. We refer you not therefore to feelings, but to facts, in order to learn whether ye are continuing, as ye ought to do, to shew forth in your lives the evidences of your regeneration. The works of the workings of the Spirit are these: peace, and

faith, and love, and every virtue; and every virtue proceeding out of a good and honest heart, and unfeigned sincerity of obedience to the will of God. If these things then be in you and abound, blessed are ye; for then ye are the sons of God, led by his Spirit, and the heirs, through perseverance, of everlasting glory. But, if these things be in you only imperfectly, or casually, or feebly, all hope indeed is not departed for ever; but it may well become you to remember, to "stir up the gift of God which is in you," through baptism, and by temperance, sobriety, and chastity; by meditation, and piety, and prayer; by every common virtue, which obtains the praise of man; and much more by the practice of every uncommon duty, which is despised and neglected of men, to seek after the praise of God, and labour to restore the health, and preserve the life of your souls; lest the angel of death should come, and ye should be found wicked or wanting. But if none of these things be in you, or remain in you *at all;* if seeking for goodness in your hearts, ye can find *none;* if there be in you the powers of reasoning, without the effects of righteousness; the labour of learning, without learning to do well in any measure or degree; if there be in you the excellency of speech, and the barren glories of understanding and know-

ledge, without any of the real and eternal excellencies of purity and godliness; the truth must be spoken, though with tears; if ye have utterly quenched, and are altogether dead to the Spirit, it is impossible, says the Apostle, "for those who were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift; if they should fall away, to renew them again unto repentance."

Yet we would not wish to bruise the broken reed, though we do thus speak. Those that fear lest they should be dead to the Spirit, we would comfort with the assurance that they are not so. For wherever there is spiritual fear, there is spiritual hope, seeing, that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." And even of those, that *appear* to be lost to God and drowned in iniquity, we would not too boldly speak, as if they were irremediably lost beyond the very power and possibility of redemption, lest we should be found to have spoken foolishly in the matter, and sinned in discouraging a soul, whom it was the intention of Heaven to save. If once, indeed, we be really and altogether dead, every human source of consolation is gone, and without the intervention of a miracle, we can never live unto the Spirit again. But it hath sometimes been known, that when most of

all the body did seem dead to those around, some spark of life did yet linger in the languid frame, and power was given to man to reanimate that spark, and the *seemingly* dead did live. It may be the same too in the spiritual life, and those in whom the seed of grace is, to all outward appearance, corrupted and destroyed, those in whom the principle of holiness has been the longest inactive, who can tell whether it be utterly lost; or whether it may not, by diligence, be renovated into strength? This is a secret which belongeth unto God, and which he has graciously retained within his own knowledge, at once to prevent us from being hurried into perdition by the carelessness of confidence, or the wretchlessness of despair.

But after all, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things which accompany salvation. We are persuaded, that so highly do you value the privilege of your baptism, and that you esteem the gift of the Spirit to be so very precious, that neither tribulation or distress, principalities or powers, things present or things to come, shall be able to separate you from the obedience of God. And, in this holy confidence, we pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in all judgment, so that ye may approve the things and the doctrines that are really excellent and true.

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But above all, let your conversation be as it becometh your baptism into the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in the power of faith, and the spirit of love.

THE END.

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