

ESSAYS,

ON,

FIRST, THE NATURE, USES, AND SUBJECTS OF THE SACRAMENTS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

SECOND, ON REGENERATION, WHEREIN THE PRINCIPLE OF SPIRITUAL LIFE, THEREBY IMPLANTED, IS PARTICULARLY CONSIDERED.

THIRD, ON THE NATURE AND USE OF THE MEANS OF GRACE.

BY JOHN BLAIR, A. M.

Pastor of the Church of GOODWILL, (*alias* WALLKILL) in the State of *New-York*.

GO ye therefore and teach all Nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Mat. 28. 19.

FOR as often as ye eat this Bread, and drink this Cup, ye do shew the Lord's Death till he come.

1 Cor. 11. 26.

AND you hath he quickened who were dead in Trespases and Sins.

Ephes. 2. 1.

WHAT Advantage then hath the Jews? Or what Profit is there of Circumcision? Much every Way: Chiefly because that unto them were committed the Oracles of God.

Rom. 3. 1. 2.

LITCHFIELD:

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1787



1754
Dr. George Taylor

P R E F A C E.

COURTEOUS READER,

THE apologies of Authors for appearing, in print, and their craving the indulgence of the candid reader to the imperfections of their performances, are generally considered as meer words of course. Therefore, without the vanity to imagine I have no need, I shall however omit troubling him with any such application. Nor do I think it necessary to take up his time with the reasons and motives, which have induced me to this publication. It is to be supposed in a judgement of charity, that a writer aims at the instruction and good of mankind (unless their appear strong reasons to the contrary) and hopes his performance is, in some measure, calculated for that purpose. The subjects here touched at are, I have observed, lately become matters of much controversy: I have not been so happy as to be fully satisfied with the publications I have seen on either side: At least, as to the manner of treating these points, even by such as take the side I apprehend to be substantially the truth. I thereupon determined to renew my examination of matters so important, and so interesting in our faith and daily practice; and in doing so, I resolved simply to enquire, what appears, from
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the word of God, to be the truth on these topics; and as impartially as I could, examine the weight of occurring objections, without intermeddling as a party in the present disputes. Thus I have laid none under a necessity, nor I hope provoked any to commence a controversy with me. Angry debate seldom does the justice to truth, that may be expected from free, dispassionate enquiry; and in matters of controversy, readers are generally more curious to observe which combatant manages his part with most ingenuity, or is likely to come off conqueror, than to discover the real truth. Many of my friends will, probably, be surprized, to find I have changed my sentiments with respect to some subjects of one of the sacraments; for they know it was formerly my opinion, that the unregenerate ought not, by any means, to adventure to the Lord's table; tho' they ought to dedicate their children to God in baptism. But for some years past, I durst not be peremptory in that matter; and upon a more extensive view of the subject, I could not see, that the arguments, upon which I founded my former opinion, were conclusive, for reasons which appear in my answers to objections. Whether my arguments for the side I have taken shall appear sufficient, or not, I hope my friends will not be stumbled, but will see at least, so much appearance of weight in them, as may satisfy them, that I have changed upon principle, and from a conviction of truth by what appears to me full evidence. I hope my readers in general will endeavour to consider impartially the point of light, in which I have set these interesting subjects,

and

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and enter into the true spirit and strength of my arguments, without prejudice; and not content themselves with throwing up a little dust, in order to support strong prepossessions at any rate.

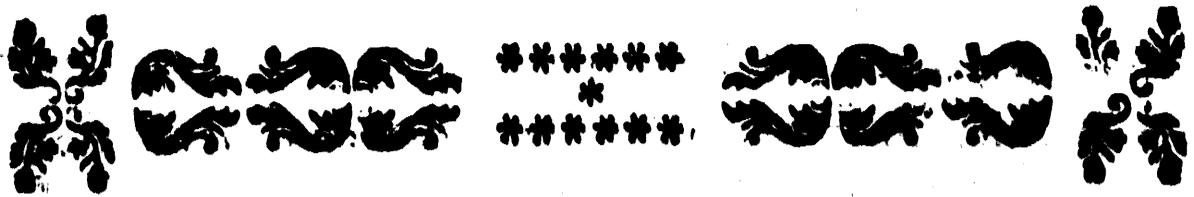
That truth may appear, be received in the love of it; and the churches of Christ may be edified; is the earnest prayer of,

Courteous reader,

Thy soul's servant for Christ's sake,

J. BLAIR.

Goodwill,
Dec. 21st, 1770.



A N

E S S A Y

On the Nature, Uses, and Subjects of the
New-Testament.

IT is disputed by some, whether God ever entered into covenant with man: The reason alledged against it is, that the parties in a covenant must, at least in respect of the matters contained therein, be upon equal footing, and free from previous obligations. But, I think, this conclusion is not founded in the nature of things, but too rashly drawn from the state of matters amongst men; which takes place only in certain cases, where human laws have made provision to that purpose, in order to prevent the abuse and encroachments of power. A reason this, which can have no place with respect to the blessed God. I see no reason in the nature of things, why a superior may not condescend to enter into covenant with an inferior for his advantage and benefit. Yea, such transactions do take place among men in many instances, as between parents and children, princes and their subjects; of this nature are charters, which are of force only on their being accepted. Now surely the great God, who can do no wrong, nor ever abuse his power, may, if he pleases, thus condescend. And I think, the institution

tion of sacramental signs and seals, puts it beyond dispute, that in fact he has. By these he ratifies and confirms a right to benefits conferred by way of promise, upon the consent of persons to certain terms; which consent is expressed, and the persons brought under solemn obligations, by partaking of them. Surely, this contains, not only the substance, but the form of a covenant.

In every dispensation, the blessed God has confirmed his covenant with man in this manner. By the tree of life, he confirmed the promise of life: And by the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the threatening of death, in the covenant of works. To this, upon its violation, succeeded the covenant of grace. This was confirmed in the patriarchal age (when God made a public distinction between his church and the world) by the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith. *Rom. 4. 11.* To which, the passover was added, upon occasion of the Israelites' deliverance from Egyptian bondage. The institution of a second seal was reserved until this time, because this deliverance was so eminently typical of the redemption of sinners by Jesus Christ. Upon the resurrection of Christ, when an entire change of the whole external administration of that gracious covenant took place, baptism was substituted in the room of circumcision, and the Lord's supper in the room of the passover, as ordinances better suited to this new frame of administration. And as this is the last dispensation of the covenant of grace, these are the last sacramental institutions, and none other are to be expected.

Seeing these sacred ordinances, baptism and the Lord's supper, have so close and solemn connection with the covenant.

venant of grace, which is the great charter of all our spiritual privileges and mercies, it is of vast importance that they be rightly understood, in order to a proper attendance upon, and improvement of them. With a view to assist the common christian in this, I shall endeavour to set before him, the Nature, Uses, and Subjects of these ordinances, as briefly as I can, in the few following observations.

I. The name, Sacrament, it must be acknowledged, is of divine authority, but human invention. It is derived from the Latin word, *sacramentum*, which, among the Romans, signified the oath, whereby their soldiers swore fidelity to their General; and by divines, applied to these sacred institutions, because of the solemn obligations to the blessed God, inferred on those who partake of them. But the principal use of names, is to suggest to the mind, without tedious circumlocutions, the things to which they are given: And this name, by common consent, answers that end in the present case. There can, therefore, be no danger from the use of it, while we give a scriptural view of the things signified thereby. This is next to be attempted.

II. A sacrament is an holy ordinance, in which, some sensible thing, or things are, by divine institution, to be used as a sign and seal of the privileges, mercies and engagements, of the covenant of grace between God and his people. A sign is something, which, by its presence or use, suggests or represents something else to the mind. This must, therefore, be some sensible visible thing. The sign in a sacrament is not a natural, but arbitrary sign; it has no natural necessary connection with the thing

thing signified; but its connection is by institution for that purpose. Written covenants among men, are confirmed by adding a bit of wax impressed with the character of a seal, which is, by a particular action and express declaration, acknowledged, and is therefore called a seal. When this is done, the covenant cannot be revoked, but by the consent and deed of both parties; without which, their engagements to each other stand good and in full force. Now, if any other sign or thing, attended with significant actions, be appointed for the same purpose, it is called by the same name. Thus the elements of water in baptism, and bread and wine in the Lord's supper, are called seals, because when used according to their institution, they have the same efficacy with respect to the covenant of grace, that there is in seals, annexed to written covenants among men. Thus then some sensible sign—its separation and appointment to its proper purpose; and in consequence thereof, its significancy and efficacy as a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, all concur to the constitution of a sacrament. This is the view of the matter which the scriptures give us. Thus, *Gen. 17. 10. 11. This is my covenant—every man child among you shall be circumcised. And it shall be a TOKEN of the covenant betwixt you and me.* It shall be a token or sign: It shall suggest to your minds the necessity of your being cut off from the old stock, and engrafted into Christ Jesus, the living vine; and that *the foreskin of your hearts, their natural hardness and stubbornness, must be taken away, and be turned to the Lord.* (See *Jer. 4. 4. Rom. 2. 28. 29.*) It is also a sign or token of the existence of the covenant. The tenor of the covenant, was the promises made to Abra-

ham v. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8; see also *Gal. iii. 14, 16.* Yet circumcision is called the covenant, v. 10. which can only mean, that the promises of the covenant are confirmed by it. Hence the apostle uses the terms, promises, and covenant, promiscuously; and observes, that the covenant was confirmed before, of God in Christ, viz. to Abraham by circumcision. *Gal. iii. 17.* And the apostle calls it *A SEAL of the righteousness of faith.* *Rom. iv. 11.*

III. Baptism and the Lord's Supper agree in the general nature of a sacrament, as above described. Yet, they differ not only in the external elements, (without which, they could not be two sacraments) but in sundry other considerable respects. As, 1st. Baptism is an initial commensurative* sign and seal, which visibly denotes the existence of God's covenant between him and the baptized party, and their entrance into the school of Christ as his disciples; and by which, their visible membership in the Church is publicly ratified. This ratification of membership in the church of Christ as his visible disciples, is, in scripture, attributed to this, and never to the other sacrament. Thus, *Mat xxviii. 19. 20. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations; and then take care of and teach them as disciples; teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you; they are hereby bound and engaged to observe and attend upon all ordinances and duties.*

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* A commensurative sign, is that which denotes the presence of the thing signified.

The Lord's supper is a commemorative sign, wherein persons recollect and recognize their engagements to be the Lord's, previously entered into in the initiating sacrament of baptism; and especially commemorate, and improve the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Persons church-membership is pre-supposed in, and prerequisite to their access to this sacrament. Hence, 2d, the sacrament of baptism is only once to be administered to, and received by the same subject. For, from what has been observed, it appears, that by one administration it obtains its whole effect. Membership in the church of Christ, admits not of degrees; a person is either a member or no member of the church; there is no ground in scripture or reason for the distinction of imperfect or perfect members; members in a passive and active state, as different sorts of members, the same member may have very different degrees of capacity for the discharge of the duties and enjoyment of the privileges of a member, but he is the same member still. An infant member cannot exercise knowledge, nor perform duty, nor in childhood can he perform duties, which require degrees of knowledge above his capacity; but yet still he is truly a member, training up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. I would ask what is done to persons in their passive state, viz. Infancy, when they are baptized. Are they not separated from the world, and dedicated to God as his peculiar property? Are they not brought under the bond of God's covenant, and under the ordinances of the gospel or means of grace, as they become capable of instruction? Are they not really bound, and that so as, upon its being duly laid before them, their consciences must feel the obligation, to cleave

God in Christ, to perform all christian duties, and, among the rest, to renew their covenant engagements at the Lord's table. But do they, by approaching the Lord's table, acquire a new state of membership? In what scripture is that declared? I would further ask, whether an adult person, when baptized, is a perfect member, or only imperfect, a member in embryo? If the latter, then the matter does not turn upon the difference between the passive and active state, and so that distinction must be given up; but the imperfection of his membership must arise from an insufficiency in the sacrament of baptism to ratify it; that is, it is not sufficient to ratify what it is expressly appointed to ratify—*Mat. xxviii. 19*—which is absurd; but, if the former, then there is perfect membership by baptism, previous to coming to the Lord's table. Therefore, also, baptism so confirms church-membership to an infant, as to maintain and make good his title, as he arrives to capacity of enjoyment; for its efficacy takes place after, as well as at the time of administration, even thro' the whole course of life. Thus, though a baptized person should not be regenerated and united to Christ by a saving faith until old age; yet, thereupon, his baptism, which he received in infancy, seals his ingrafting into Christ, and his personal interest in the special blessings of the covenant, otherwise, where is the great advantage of infant baptism? Hence, also, it appears how groundless and unreasonable the distinction, which obtains in many places, between the church and the congregation. By this means, the greater part of worshipping societies are excluded from the care and discipline of the church, and yet are, in some respects, treated as members, in being admitted

admitted to dedicate their children to God in baptism; there is great inconsistency in these things. But to return—From the very nature of a commemorative sign, it is evident, it is designed to affect the heart by frequently bringing to remembrance the things signified; therefore, must be frequently used for that purpose. Hence, as the sacrament of the Lord's supper is such, therefore it must be often celebrated by the same persons. They are to *eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord often.* 1 Cor. xi. 26.

3. These two sacraments differ with respect to some of their subjects. Actual exercise, and a competent knowledge of the nature of the ordinance and transactions required, for which a proper degree of natural capacity is requisite, are indispensibly necessary to an attendance on the sacrament of the Lord's supper. Without this, it could not be to persons what it is, viz. a commemorative sign, its subserviency to its end, is from the impression it is calculated to make on the heart, in attending upon it; but as circumcision of old, so baptism, which succeeds it now, is to be administered to infants, born of professing parents.

IV. The sacraments are public signs and seals of the covenant of grace, as transacted between the blessed God and his church as such. The covenant of grace, is the great and glorious charter, by which Jehovah has erected and constituted his church. She stands related to him and interested in him by covenant—Ezek. xvi. 8. *Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold thy time was a time of love, and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: Yea, I swore unto thee, and thou*

becomest

becomest mine. Hence it is, that the church is so repeatedly considered in scripture, as married to the Lord. It is a marriage covenant: This, I think, is the primary view of the covenant of grace, as thus represented and confirmed by sign and seal; and it comprehends all the personal interests of individuals, as members of the body of Christ, and belonging to that society; in all God's covenant-transactions with men; of which we have an account in scripture; the persons, with whom he immediately transacted, are not to be considered in a strict or abstract personal capacity, but as members of society, or as including the church. Thus, when the gracious God opened and established his covenant with our first parents after the fall.—Gen. iii. 15.—They were then the church of God, and the stock from whence it was to be propagated. In the covenant-transaction with Abraham, he is considered as the father of many nations.—Gen. xvii. 5. The church is set up in his house, his family, yea, the whole, both Jewish and christian church are included—Rom. iv. 10, 11, 12, 13. Gal. iii. 14. 16. None of the promises of the covenant are directed to any, who are out of the church. All who are aliens to the commonwealth of Israel, are strangers to the covenants of promise—Eph. ii. 12. The promises do, indeed, describe particular characters, and point out particular conditions and circumstances of God's people, to which they are accommodated. Hence, persons of those characters, and in such condition or circumstances, may claim a personal interest in such promises. Yet, this is not by virtue of any personal direction of the promise; but he pleads it as comprehended in the church, and belonging to the character described. Yea, there are

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promises, which cannot be claimed by the particular persons whose character and case they point out; but can be pleaded only by the church. Thus, Ezk. xxxvi. 26, 27. *A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit also will I put within you, and I will take the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh; and I will put my spirit within you; and cause you to walk in my statutes.* Here the character pointed out is that of the unregenerate; but surely, the promise cannot be considered as directed to that character. For then, the blessed God would stand engaged by promise, to all of that character, to give them regenerating grace, and each one might claim it, as that which God could not refuse consistent with his faithfulness, or without denying himself; but the faith of the church may rest upon it, and she may plead it as a promise of God's presence in her with his own ordinances, for the purpose of regenerating sinners: And in every instance of their conversion, God is fulfilling that promise to his church. Sinners are, indeed, hence encouraged to cry to God for grace, and to attend upon the means of grace, but they can found no claim upon it. Hence we may see, that to have matter of encouragement, and to have a ground of confidence and claim, are not the same thing, as some seem strangely to imagine.

The church of Christ is usually, and very properly distinguished into visible and invisible. By the invisible church is meant, the whole number of true believers wherever they are. All these are, by a vital union with Christ by faith, savingly interested in the covenant of grace; in God as their God, and in all spiritual blessings.

sings. But their consent to the covenant, and their relation to God thereby, is altogether invisible, and known only to God and their own consciences. These are called a church, because they are members of Christ by a common union with him, and stand united with, and related to each other in one body in a church state, as they are included in the catholic visible church.

The visible church consists of all those, who by an external profession of the doctrines of the gospel, and subjection to the laws and ordinances of Christ, appear as a society separated from the world, and dedicated to God and his service. In this view, in this imperfect state, the church comprehends branches that are withered, as well as those that bear fruit. Now the covenant of grace subsists between the blessed God and the church, as such a visible society,* and is rendered visible, by a visible transaction and external administration in various ordinances; and comprehends fundry external privileges for the advantage and spiritual edification of the church.

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* In no other way can we conceive the covenant to subsist between God and believers as a church. In the exercise of faith, believers have union to, and communion with Jesus Christ; but by this alone, they could have no fellowship with one another; for each one could only be conscious of his own exercise of faith, and could have no society with any other the same. Whatever real relation to each other is founded in their communion to Christ, yet they could not all perceive it. They would be members of Christ, but utterly detached from each other, and so not formally a body. It is only as incorporated in the visible church, that they are fully placed in the body, and can have any knowledge one of another, and to have any fellowship.

Here are not two covenants, one for the invisible church, and another for the visible; for these are not two churches, but a twofold consideration of the same church, though undoubtedly considered as visible; she includes more members, than considered as invisible. The visible church includes the invisible. Wherever there is a true visible church, there are, no doubt, a number of true saints; from these as the better part, the visible church is denominated; by their faith, the church lays hold on the covenant, and her covenant-relation to God is maintained, and all visible believers share in her external privileges, whatever their real internal state be. Accordingly, then, one and the same covenant, comprehends the whole interests of the church considered both as visible and invisible, with respect to internal, special, spiritual blessings, and external privileges. The great God stands related to the invisible church, by virtue of this covenant, as her God, by way of special interest in him, and by the same covenant to the visible church, as visibly her God and Lord.

It is the covenant of grace in this view, viz. as visibly subsisting between God and his church, considered as a visible society, a public body separated and distinguished from the world, and dedicated to God, that the sacraments are annexed as visible signs and seals thereof. To this purpose I would observe, that when it pleased God first to set up his church in Adam's family, the whole was included. As there were none from whom to separate and distinguish his church, the Lord saw fit to propose his covenant more obscurely, and designing that as a more imperfect dispensation, he only taught them

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by sacrifices, there v shadowing forth the redemption of sinners by Jesus Christ. When mankind greatly, though gradually degenerated, as he was not gathering his church out of the world, but men went out of the church, he did not still see fit to appoint any public badge of distinction; but upon a general apostacy, he destroyed the old world, and the church continued to exist in Noah's family. Thus he was pleased, as it were to give a new edition of his church, and the whole world was again included in it. But when mankind had again generally revolted and turned aside to idolatry, having promised and confirmed it by his bow in the cloud, that he would no more destroy the world; he saw proper to call Abraham out from amongst his kindred, and erect his church in his family. Here the blessed God more fully opens his great plan, more explicitly proposes his covenant, and solemnly transacts it with Abraham, not as a private person, but as the father of many nations; comprising therein, not only his family then in being, but both the Jewish and christian church. It was proper, that a matter of so great and extensive importance, should be transacted with peculiar solemnity, and that there should be some public badge of distinction between the church, thus separated to him, and the world. God was pleased, therefore, to ratify his covenant, and publicly distinguish his visible church, from the world, by the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith. To distinguish between the church and the world, seems to be one important design of the initiating seal of the covenant; because in that, a person's membership in the church is publicly declared and ratified. Commemorative signs, such as the passover of the Lord's supper,

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are designed to establish, edify and quicken those who are in the church, rather than to distinguish them from those who are without. But the initiating seal, as circumcision or baptism, though it has other ends in common with the other sacrament; yet is particularly designed as God's mark set upon persons, to distinguish them from the world, as his. Thus, though he had indulged the frailties in the omission of circumcision, while travelling in the wilderness,† partly because of their continual journeying, and partly because they were then entirely at a distance from all other nations; (otherwise he could have ordered them to delay their journey for a time, in order to perform it) yet when they came over Jordan among the Canaanites, they must not enter upon the war until they were circumcised; as also, in order to the celebration of the passover. This day, saith the Lord, have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you, *i. e.* your being uncircumcised like the Egyptians, from amongst whom ye came. *Josh. v. 9.*

Hence appears the great impropriety of private baptisms, unless where real necessity requires it. Seeing it is God's public seal, it should be publicly applied; as it is a sign and seal of membership in the visible church of Christ, it should be transacted in the face of the church.

V. Sundry

• *They indulged their omission, not because he had excommunicated them, for he had abundantly shewed his care of and regard to the congregation of Israel as still his people; and those who were uncircumcised, were not the subject of the resentful sentence God had pronounced, but those who fell in the wilderness, upon whom it was fully executed.*

V. Sundry important Uses of the Sacraments have been already suggested in the foregoing observations. Yet it may be proper here to recollect, and more explicitly attend to them, together with some others not expressly mentioned, that we may have them more fully before us in one view. And,

First. As signs of the covenant of grace; they serve in the first place, to give divine truths a more easy access to the mind, with more fixed impression. Such is the strange connection between soul and body in the present state, that they mutually affect each other. Hence the attention and thoughts of the mind are excited to, and fixed upon objects by the exercise of the external senses, and by this means it is more deeply affected. Thus, in baptism, by the washing with water, the efficacy of which is to cleanse, we are led to contemplate our guilt and moral pollution by sin, the efficacy of the atoning blood of Christ to remove guilt, and of the holy Spirit's influences to purify the heart; the excellency, freeness and abundance of the spiritual blessings, &c. The elements of bread broken and wine, which was pressed from the grape in the Lord's supper; suggest to our remembrance the painful anguish and violent death of Christ, when his body was broken on the cross, and his precious blood was shed. *1 Cor. xi. 26.* Bread, which is the staff of life, and wine which cheers the heart, points out Christ as the source of life, strength and consolation; and while many partake of the same bread, and the same cup, it denotes their communion with one another, as members of the same body of Christ.

Second. They serve as visible signs of the existence of the covenant of grace between God and his people, and so renders their covenant relation to God visible. Yea, in the participation of the sacraments, the covenant is visibly transacted; consenting to the covenant, whereby persons truly enter into it, is an internal act of the heart, invisible, and purely personal, in which there can be no social concurrence of the church. It was, therefore, necessary there should be some external solemnity, some visible transaction, whereby it should be declared rendered visible, and wherein the church can unite and have fellowship. Thus God says of circumcision, --- *it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you.* Gen. xvii. 11. Therefore, 3dly, these signs are public badges of distinction between the church and the world. They are, as it were, God's mark, whereby he publicly challenges the church as his, and persons are visibly separated to his service; and especially, in the initiating sacrament, one particular design of which, is to signify and confirm our visible membership in the church.

2dly, As seals confirming the covenant of grace, they primarily seal the truth and certainty of gospel promises according to their true tenor. They confirm the certain connection by divine constitution, between faith in Christ and the pardon of sin, and the vouchsafement of all spiritual blessings; and that in this way, God will be his people's God, and not otherwise. 2d. They confirm the obligations of the covenant upon all those who partake of them. They are bound to cleave to the righteousness of Christ, to give up their hearts to God, and to serve him in all holy obedience; to observe his statutes,

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and attend upon all his ordinances. *Mat. xxviii. 20.* Hence the offences and disobedience of visible church members are peculiarly resented as a breach of covenant. *Hos. vi. 7.* When persons do truly consent to the covenant by embracing Jesus Christ, then, and not otherwise, the sacrament's seal, is a personal saving interest in the promises of the covenant. The seals of the covenant confirms its promises only as they are proposed, and not as they are not. Therefore, whoever only visibly consents to the covenant, but not with the whole heart, though the sacraments seal the truth and certainty of the promises in themselves, *s. gr.* Whosoever believes shall be saved, &c. (the connection between faith and salvation is ratified: Hence sinners have sure ground to go upon in venturing upon Christ) yet they do not confirm an interest in the promise of salvation to this person while he does not truly believe; but when he truly believes, the seals of the covenant, in sealing or ratifying the certain connection between faith and salvation, consequently seals his personal interest in the promise of salvation; as being one of the characters to which the promise is made and ratified. 4th. They seal to the church, as a visible society, the external privileges of the covenant; such as the care and discipline of the church over her several members; the ordinances of worship by which the covenant is administered, a gospel ministry, and the care of divine Providence, both in correcting and in preserving and protecting, &c. from all which, complexly taken, it appears,

3dly, The sacraments are designed to promote and maintain the external purity, and visible holiness of the church

church; and this they do two ways. First, they lay bonds upon the conscience. Sacramental transactions include in them the most solemn engagements to be the Lord's, to renounce the service of sin, and to walk in the way of God's commandments. These engagements affect the conscience, and, at least, lay restraints upon men, whereby they are kept in from the external practice of sin, and excited to practise the external duties of religion: Hereby the visible reputation of religion is much preserved. Those who look upon themselves free from these obligations, though they own the doctrines of the gospel to be true, and would rather claim the christian name than any other, yet more generally live as they list, and still their consciences sleep pretty secure; hereby the name of God is greatly dishonoured. I really think, the so general neglect of the Lord's table, much promotes this security in the indulgence of sinful practices and neglect of religion. People entertain an unaccountable notion, that baptism, which they received in infancy, does not so deeply bind them to such great strictness in the ways of holiness; and therefore, while they keep back from the other sacrament, they may take a greater latitude. 2. They give existence and efficacy to discipline. In order to the very being of discipline, there must be something from which persons may be debarred, or cut off, consistent with the great design of the gospel; and it must be something of very great importance. But this cannot consist in debarring any from hearing the word preached, and the other means of instruction; for that would be to give up with them altogether, and use no more means for their conversion. It must therefore lye in debarring them from the seals of

the covenant, till they appear penitent, where the lighter censures, such as admonitions and rebukes, are found ineffectual or inadequate, and indeed these would not be regarded as censures, if the contumacious had no higher to expect. The government of Christ's house could not be kept up, if there were no penalties to be inflicted in his name. The efficacy of discipline lies in affecting and awing the conscience; but what can so effectually do this, as suspending offenders from the privilege of communicating with God's people in the seals of the covenant, either in dedicating their children to God in baptism, or approaching the Lord's table, until they appear, in dealing with him, to be brought to repentance? Or finally cutting them off, when their conduct shall be found such as amounts to a full, obstinate, and avowed violation of their covenant obligations? If they have any regard to christianity at all, they will dread the thoughts of being reduced to the state of heathen men and publicans. See 1 Cor. x. 21, 22.---cap. v. verse 3, 4, 5. 2 Cor. ii. 6, 7, 8.

ably. These holy ordinances seem to be instituted to shew, that the blessed God is not to be put off with acknowledging in general terms, the truth of gospel doctrines, and that religion is good, and ought to be chosen. He demands our avowed choice of it, and that we avow the Lord for our God. The Lord, by these institutions, as it were, says, I will bring the matter to a point with you sinners. You acknowledge me to be the only true God, and that you ought to serve me; come then to a resolution on the matter. Here are the terms of salvation, and on which I will be your God, proposed to you

in a way of gracious covenant, either accept or refuse; enter into solemn, openly avowed obligations to me, or disown me, and declare you will not take me for your God. Choose you this day whom you will serve, the Lord, or your own heart's lusts. Either join yourselves openly to my people, or acknowledge you will not be of them. Surely, if men viewed things in this point of light, it would have a strong tendency to awaken them to solemn exercises of heart about this matter.

5thly. The sacraments are, in a special manner, calculated and designed to cherish, quicken and strengthen the graces of the holy spirit in true believers. They exhibit Jesus Christ and him crucified (the great object of a justifying faith) and the glorious blessings he has purchased to the mind in a very striking and lively manner. Such pledges of the divine faithfulness; such solemn confirmations of the promises of life and salvation through the redemption of Christ, lay the firmest foundation for the confidence, and most intense acting of faith. Here are the most affecting representations of the love and grace of God towards his children. Surely, then, the influence of the holy spirit concurring with all these exhibitions, must needs invigorate faith, quicken and raise the affections, and enliven every grace. These ordinances, therefore, are often means of the most sweet and near communion with God.

VI. The foregoing observations, if duly attended to, I think, throw considerable light upon this question, viz. Who are the proper subjects of the sacraments? as may perhaps, more fully appear by and by. This question has a respect to two sorts of persons, viz. Those who are

born

born out of the church, and so must enter at such years of such understanding as to be capable of transacting for themselves, if ever they do; and such as are born in the church, i. e. of parents who are themselves visible church members. The latter have a right to membership by virtue of the covenant, as subsisting between God and his visible church. It is true, the child's right to membership follows the right of the parents, either both, or any one of them. Hence, if parents be suspended from privileges by the censures of the church, or charged with such offences as expose thereto, the child's right is in suspense until that stumbling-block be removed; for hereby the parent's right is called in question. The reason is, that though the parents are not cut off from membership, but only under a temporary suspension from privilege; by which discipline, the church is dealing with them, in order to bring them to repentance, and to behave as becomes members, and to recover their right; yet, if to such offence they should add obstinate impenitence, and all due pains to bring them to repentance prove ineffectual, they would be cut off. In that case, they would be excluded all right, and so could not be a medium, by which their child could derive any. Therefore, their conduct, in the mean while, renders their right doubtful, until they appear to repent; consequently, the child's right is doubtful also. But still, it is not the faith of the parents, even considered as visible, which immediately confers the right upon the child: For an act of faith, considered simply as such, is merely personal, and can communicate nothing to another; but it is from the parent's visible interest in the covenant, and its external privileges, in

consequence of their visible faith (of which privilege, its comprehending their infant seed together with themselves, is an important one) that the child derives its right of membership, *i. e.* from the parent's visible church-membership.

As to the former, *viz.* such as are born out of the church, they have no right of membership, until, by their own personal transaction, they acquire it. This is done by acknowledging the doctrines of the gospel to be true, yielding subjection to the laws and ordinances of Jesus Christ, and publicly embracing the true religion, and expressing a consent to the covenant of grace in the sacrament of baptism, which is the door of entrance and seal of membership. Thus the son of the stranger joins himself to the Lord, by taking hold of his covenant *Isaiab, lvi. 6.*

But in order to throw greater light upon my subject in my further consideration of it, I think it necessary to stop, while I consider another question of great importance here, *viz.* What is that profession of true religion which constitutes membership in the visible church? I say, constitutes membership. For, to be visibly one of the true religion, and to be a member of the visible church is the same thing. Now, this includes in it an acknowledgement of the doctrines of the gospel, as true, and obligation of the laws of Christ, both verbal; for with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation. *Rom. x. 9.* And practical by obedience, and partaking of baptism, as a sign and seal of embracing the true religion, and dedication to God and his service. In which covenant relation to God thus solemnly ratified, visible church-membership

church-membership formally lies. Membership in the church is pre-requisite to, and supposed in approaching to the other sacrament of the Lord's supper, but not constituted by it. In this sacrament, former engagements are recognized and renewed; and the edification and spiritual advantage of those already members of the church, is promoted. Now, the aforesaid profession and dedication is either actual, when persons are arrived to years of understanding, and transact for themselves, or virtual; in the profession and transactions, in their behalf, of those who have a right to dedicate them to God, as in the case of infants. These are comprehended in the covenant with the church, as the seed of professing parents, and are visibly children of the promise, their parents are engaged to train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and teach them, from their early childhood, the ways of true religion. As they become capable of instruction, it is expected of them that they will be acquainted with, and acknowledge the truths, and practice the duties of religion; and are reputed the professors of it, until they disavow it. If any thing contrary to this should appear, either in neglecting the known duties of religion, or immoralities in practice, they ought to be dealt with by the discipline of the church, until they are either reclaimed, or regularly cut off. To the neglect of this, no doubt, it is in a great degree owing, that there is so much negligence in matters of religion amongst youth. Now all these together, and none of them alone, amount to a visible profession of true religion. The most orthodox sentiments only shew, that a person owns sound principles to be true, at least understands them, but does not amount to

a profession of embracing them. The practice of religious duties affords yet a higher probability, that the doctrines of religion make some impression upon the heart, yet does not signify upon what principles a person professes to act; whether from a supreme regard to God, or merely from custom, &c. but when to both these is added, a solemn covenant-transaction, in partaking of a seal thereof, instituted on purpose, not only to confirm the truth of the gospel on God's part, but to express the man's consent to the covenant of grace, and dedication of himself to the Lord, to serve him upon the principles thereof; then the matter becomes determinate and fixed. If he does all this with his whole heart, he is a true christian. By this external profession he visibly appears such, and never does appear such, until he partake of, at least, the initiating seal and token of the covenant. As the word and sacraments are the marks of the true church, so they are of the true christian.

There are, indeed, who place a profession of true religion in something beside the above-mentioned, and altogether prior to coming to sacraments, namely, some declaration that they do so far as they know themselves, accept of Christ as their Saviour, and take God for their God, and give themselves up to his service with all their hearts. Upon this principle, many ministers draw up a covenant in form, containing such expressions as the above. This they require persons to take publicly, previous to their approaching the Lord's table, or presenting their children to baptism. No doubt a minister should be careful in examining such as he admits to sacraments. Hereby he will detect the grossly ignorant,

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who ought, on that account, to be debarred. In this way he will be under better advantages for apprehending what views and sense of things they have, and to judge what advices it may be proper to give them; but I have some exceptions to the requisition of a declaration of such a tenor, or taking a covenant drawn up in such a set form. I doubt it will rather prove a snare, than be of any real advantage. Such a covenant is designed either as an immediate transaction with God, or as a solemn declaration to the church, for their greater satisfaction as to the persons admitted. In the former view, it is useless and superfluous; for it is only doing the same thing that is done in partaking of the seals of the covenant, which God has instituted as public signs, and solemn ratifications of such a transaction; with this difference, that instead of the public actions of divine appointment as signs, to which the word of God has affixed such a sense, such a particular form of expression is proposed as the public sign; and with respect to persons already baptised, it seems to insinuate, that they are not already in the church, and in covenant with God, by virtue of their baptism, which is contrary to fact.— But are not the signs which our Lord Jesus Christ has appointed, and the manner of covenanting which he has prescribed sufficient, without the addition of our own inventions to supply the defect?

But if only a declaration, as matter of satisfaction to the Church, is designed; pray, will it afford better evidence of a man's sincerity of heart, to hear him pronounce such words, than to see him use actions, which, by divine appointment, signify substantially the same thing

thing? And therefore, of the same import with the aforesaid declaration? To require such a declaration, is to require a person to pronounce or affirm something concerning the exercises of his own heart, as a term of admission. This cannot be considered as a declaration of a matter of fact, but only his opinion, or, at most, judgement of himself. Now his judgement may be formed upon evidence that is really such to himself. But, pray, what evidence is that to others? Here, I doubt, the formal professor will be more ready to pronounce, than many a true christian. I would appeal to the ministers who are in this practice, whether, on the one hand, they do not find reason to fear that these declarations, or even covenants, are sunk to matter of mere form; and on the other, whether they do not find a number of poor perplexed souls, upon whom they must look in a judgement of scriptural charity, as the children of God, who yet are full of apprehension they have not the saving grace of God. Yea, their prevailing opinion may be on that side, and dare not make such a peremptory declaration, either to their fellow-men, or in a covenant-transaction with God; and though many a salvo be proposed, yet their conscience is not satisfied. May not a christian really give up his heart to God, and yet not be able to declare he has done so, even in his own judgement? Others may flatter themselves that they have really consented to the covenant, when, indeed, it is otherwise. Can it be the divine will that matters should be set upon so precarious a footing, and such a snare should be laid for men, to embarrass their way? Shall our duty be directed by so uncertain a rule?

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If it be objected here, that I maintain sacramental transactions to be substantially of the same import, and the sacraments are signs of our consent to the covenant of grace, and will not that involve the same difficulty?

I answer, No. The sacraments are indeed signs of our consent to the covenant; but they are not signs of our opinion of the kind of that consent too; they are not signs of our declaring that consent to be true and saving. It is one thing really to consent, and another to be able to pronounce that consent to be right; the command of God is a plain rule of duty. A person, therefore, under great perplexity about the state of his soul, may yet find himself bound in conscience to attempt obedience to God. Very true, he ought to have in view the nature of the duty, and what is required of him in it. He is required to give the full consent of his heart to the new covenant, and yield himself up to God. This is the business that lies before him, and which he is to attempt in receiving the seals of the covenant, but here is no set form of words he is to use; he will transact with God in such mental language as best expresses the frame of his heart. Perhaps, he cannot feel that freedom of heart he desires, and dare not say, I do consent; I do give up my heart to thee, O God, but can only say, I desire to cleave to Christ; O to be found in him! O that I could get my heart opened, and full of cheerfulness in giving myself away to the Lord. If he has just apprehensions of these things, and these desires under these apprehensions are really from his heart, he does consent and yield himself him to God; and yet, at the same time, may be far from being satisfied that he has done so.

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so, but go away full of bitter complaints. It is easy to see the wide difference in the two cases.

But it is time to return to the question I left. When the sons of the stranger are instructed in the doctrines of the gospel, are convinced in their judgement and conscience, they are true, and exhibit the true religion; that they are bound by the authority of God to embrace it, and yield obedience to the divine laws; it is their immediate duty to embrace it, and that publicly and avowedly, by joining themselves to the Lord and his Church, in the sacrament of baptism; and thus make a public profession of the true religion, come under solemn obligations to walk in the ways of God's commandments, and under the care and discipline of the church. The blessed God will not have matters lying loose, but has appointed the sacraments to bring them to a point, and to reduce persons to some determination either to appear before God and religion, or reject him; nor may they plead, by way of excuse, that though they are convinced of the truth of the christian religion, and that all this is their duty, yet their hearts hang back and do not yield. God will not sustain this as a plea. Shall their disobedience stand as a good argument why they should not obey? Surely they are more likely to obtain divine grace in the church, than out of it among the heathen; they ought to stretch out the withered hand, to attempt giving themselves to the Lord in covenant. They are to set the terms of the covenant in view, and attempt to give the consent of their hearts, and that in the solemn transaction which God has commanded. How know they, but while they are attempt-

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ing, the heart may be made to yield? Or, if it still hang back, and does not go forth in acts of faith: Are they not likely to be more exercised about the matter, now they are under solemn obligation thereto, than when they had not come under it?

Now, all baptized persons, I have already shewed, are visible members of the church of Christ. By this dedication, they are bound to attend upon all the duties and ordinances belonging to the christian character, as they shall arrive to sufficient strength of natural powers; different duties require different degrees of natural ability. The want of this will excuse from the discharge of duties, which would otherwise be incumbent, but want of moral ability, through our default, does not excuse at all. Therefore, I say, they stand bound, by their baptismal dedication, to serve God in all the duties of the christian religion, for which they have a sufficient natural capacity; and it is given in commission to the ministers of the gospel, to teach those they have *disciplined to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded. Mat. xxviii. 20.* Now the Lord's supper is one of those things he has commanded his disciples. Therefore, all baptized persons are bound, as they come to years of understanding, to attend upon it.

It is, indeed, here to be observed, that such are grossly ignorant (having sufficient natural capacity) or guilty of gross immoralities, or habitually neglect the known duties of practical religion, are to be excluded from the sacraments by the regular exercise of church discipline, till by repentance and reformation they remove the offence. The reason is, that these things are such visible violations

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violations of, and contradictions to the covenant, that to admit such, would destroy one great design of the sacraments, viz. To preserve the external holiness and purity of the church, and be visible signs of our consent to God's gracious covenant, and avouching the Lord for our God; for they, who by their works deny God, cannot be supposed to choose him. It would be, in short, to prostitute the ordinance, and leave no visible difference between the deportment of church-members and the world, and destroy all distinction of the church from those who are without. But all this is so far from inferring, that the law commanding attendance upon sacraments does not bind them, that it supposes the contrary; for how else can this prohibition be considered as a penalty and privation of privilege? It is upon this principle, viz. The obligation of the duty, that such censure serves to affect the conscience, and awaken the offender to repentance, that he may be restored. The ground of such a censure must be some fact or facts, which can be certainly known and judged of; and of such a nature as, if obstinately persisted in, after all due pains taken with the party, would cut him off from all right of membership. The obligation to attend those holy ordinances, binds such offenders to shun the scandals which exclude them; and by thus excluding themselves, they very criminally turn their backs upon them.

But the church has the authority of Christ for thus excluding the scandalous, 1 Cor. v. 11. *But now I have written unto you, says the apostle, not to keep company, if any man, that is called a brother, be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a raiser, or a drunkard, or an extortioner,*

extortioner, with such an one, no, not to eat. I am not so clear as some commentators seem to be, that the eating here mentioned does not mean eating at the Lord's table, because connected with the caution not to keep company, I rather think it does; for they are plainly matters of discipline, of which the apostle speaks, and a conduct consequent upon the church's passing judgement, as appears by the next verse; and it was natural enough to observe, that such a judgement passed upon a person, inferred an obligation on church-members, to avoid even that civil society or company with such a person, which they might allow themselves in with their heathen neighbours. However, if it intend eating in ordinary meals, the argument from this passage, in support of discipline, will still hold good. For if we must avoid civil society or fellowship with a person at his or our own table, much more, such a solemn act of communion as eating with him at the Lord's table. But all regular members of the visible church, of understanding sufficient to be able to attend to the Lord's supper, as a commemorative sign, are bound, by the authority of Jesus Christ, to shew forth his death till he come, and are highly criminal in neglecting it; and such as are parents, are bound to dedicate their children to God in baptism.— By this means, the visible church is propagated and preserved. It is doubtless one end of the ordinance of baptism, to collect materials into the church, and under the ordinances of the gospel, as subjects of divine influences.

It will be objected here, that many baptized persons, it is to be feared, the greater part, are unregenerate,

and unbaptized persons may be convinced in their consciences, that the christian religion is true, and it is their duty to embrace it, yet be still in a natural state; therefore, it will follow, that the unregenerate ought to come to sacraments, this their unhappy state notwithstanding. I admit the consequence; they are under the same obligation to this as to other duties of religion.

If it be said, that if the unregenerate are bound to come to sacraments, then it will follow, that the sacraments are not visible signs of true christians, or of a visible profession of true religion.

I deny the consequence. It no more follows on this than the contrary supposition; for, on all hands it is granted, that many unregenerate persons do come to sacraments: Indeed, if I alledged, no more was required of them in that transaction, than an unregenerate sinner, continuing such, can do, then the aforesaid consequence would follow. For the sacraments can be visible signs of no more than they signify, or is required in them. But I only say, the persons who are unregenerate, are notwithstanding, really bound, by the authority of God to this, as well as any other duty of religion, they disobey him in neglecting it; nor will their unregenerate be any plea for their neglect. But yet they are bound to do all in attending that the true christian does: To accept Christ as their Saviour, make choice of God as their God, and to give themselves wholly to him. He requires the unregenerate to make them new hearts and turn into the Lord. *Ezek. xviii. 31, 32.* And surely he may justly require them to do this with external solemnity by way of covenant, and visibly avow

ratify their joining themselves to the Lord. By the institution of these ordinances, the Lord, as it were, says to sinners, it will not do only to entertain a good opinion of religion as true and necessary, but I insist upon it, that you will either embrace or reject it; avouch me as your God, or disavow me. Choose you this day whom you will serve. Here is my covenant; here are the terms of salvation; these overtures I solemnly ratify; on my part, by these public signs and seals, as most sure foundations, on which you may safely depend, and I demand that you strike a covenant with me, and openly confirm it by receiving the seals thereof. If, indeed, in this transaction, your hearts hang back, and don't consent, I cannot approve and accept you; yet if you neglect this institution, and will not so much as make the attempt to yield yourselves; I will consider this as an open and avowed rejection of me and my service. Is there any thing unreasonable in this requisition? And who can tell but that in setting these matters solemnly before them, and attempting, in obedience to God's commands, to give themselves up to him in these solemn covenant-transactions, the holy spirit may concur, and make the heart to yield? If it do, the business is done; they are true christians; and who that beholds these solemn transactions, can say the heart does not consent? Therefore, the sacraments are visible signs of a profession of true religion, and the persons who partake of them are to be treated as christians, till the contrary appears.

It is sometimes said, that the unregenerate are, indeed, obliged to come to sacraments, but not immedi-

ately: It is their duty, but not their immediate duty. They are first to come to Christ, and then come to sacraments.

To which I answer, then it is not now their duty in present circumstances; therefore their staying back is so far from being criminal, that they do right. To talk of the mediate obligation of a law prescribing duty, is a contradiction. The law either obliges a person now or it does not oblige him. In a covenant or promise, there may be a conditional obligation, which depends upon some event, or something to be done by another as the condition. Yet even then, until the condition takes place, there is no actual obligation. But a law obliges without any other condition than the right authority of the legislator, and it obliges all to whom it is given, to immediate obedience, from the time of its promulgation, or commencement; and the neglect of it exposes to punishment, as a disobedience, cases of natural inability only excepted.

As to the newly invented plea, that God commands no unregenerate duties (a very odd phrase) or does not command unregenerate men, as such, to do duties. It really does not deserve a serious answer; for the meaning must be, either, that the law of God does not command any duties to be done upon the principles from which unregenerate men act, or in the manner, in which only they can perform them, while they continue such, and then, it is nothing to the purpose. None of my reasoning are built upon, or require any such supposition. No, it is a spiritual holy obedience that is required of them; the same that is required of the most

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holy saint; and their unregeneracy or moral inability, affords them no excuse;—or else it must intend, that persons, who are unregenerate, are not comprehended in the obligation of the law; it does not command them to do any thing in religion, till they shall be regenerated. The very mention of which so glares with absurdity, that I believe there will be none found daring enough to assert it. For, upon that supposition, the unregenerate would be set free from all obligation to the practice of duty at once; their neglect of all religion would be no disobedience.

But it is objected, there is a difference between natural and positive, or instituted duties. The former, as prayer, for instance, bind all mankind, by virtue of the original law given to man in innocence; but the latter are, by the qualifications required in them, limited to the persons in whom the qualifications are found.

Answer. Natural duties are qualified, as well as positive. Gracious principles, and a holy manner of action are equally required in both. Nor will the original obligation of the moral law natural, make any difference in the case. For it is a principle of the law, that whatsoever positive institutions God shall make known as his will, are to be obeyed. Positive laws as universally bind all of the general character to which they are directed, as do natural. Nor do the qualifications required in duties, at all limit the subjects of the law. The divine Legislator does not give his laws in this manner, viz. Whosoever have the qualifications required in them, are to perform the enjoined duties; but he requires duties so and so qualified absolutely, without IF or ANDs

of all who claim & claim a share in the general character to which they belong. All, who call themselves christians, stand obliged to all the duties of christians as such.

If it be objected, that partaking of sacraments imports a consent to the covenant of grace, which unregenerate sinners cannot give; and surely God does not require persons to declare a lie, and that in so solemn a manner.

I answer—The blessed God is so far from requiring any to declare a lie, that he commands them to transact in this covenant with all their hearts. As he has instituted sacraments, so he requires all to attend upon them with all the qualifications requisite in such attendance. Their want of the qualifications does not excuse the neglect of the external duty one moment; for their righteous sovereign does not admit their continuing unholy one moment; and therefore, there is no plea for disobedience in any one instance. The obligation of God's law does not turn upon the internal qualifications of the subject, but the rightful authority of the law-giver; and it is sufficient to justify this, that man had originally sufficient ability to obey all the will of God in a proper manner, but lost it by his own default. The blessed God, therefore, has a just right to command all that is justly due from the subjects of his government, in the most absolute manner, whatever their present internal qualifications may be. Nor can it be said, that even the unregenerate do not, in some sense, really consent to the covenant. The terms of the covenant are set before them; they acknowledge these to be the terms, the only

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terms of salvation; they yield, that it is just and right, that God should insist upon this as the only way of receiving sinners to favour; and consent that this transaction shall stand as a witness against them if their hearts stand back. It will stand good against them, as a visible public consent, before God, angels and men; and may be pleadable, yea pleaded against them in the great day of God, if their hearts shall be found wanting. This shews, it is not a vain thing to require their attendance. Here is a sufficiently important, though not the only end of these institutions. The transaction imports a declaration, that they are at least attempting to give their hearty consent, but not a declaration, whether that consent be truly sincere or not. The sacraments are not instituted to be visible signs of person's opinion or judgement concerning the exercises of their own hearts; but signs of visible consent they are, which will be of great importance for the illustration of the divine justice, in the aggravated condemnation of gospel sinners.

It is further objected, that unregenerate sinners, in partaking of sacraments, perjure themselves in the very act, and sure God does not require perjury.

Ans. It is not the crime design by the name of perjury. That consists in calling God to witness to the truth of what the party knows to be false. This consists in the non-concurrence of the heart in a solemn engagement, into which the party enters. This is the unregenerate sinner's great fault in every holy duty, his heart is not in it; and the greater solemnity of a covenant-transaction is, no doubt, a great aggravation of

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his crime; but it is not taking God to witness to a known falshood, he takes God to witness, indeed, to a solemn engagement, which he visibly, publicly, and really enters into, and declares. Though his heart concurs not in the manner God requires, yet the engagement is real; he will feel himself held and obliged to be the Lord's. But he declares nothing herein about the sincerity or insincerity of his heart in this transaction, or the engagement he thus ratifies. Were it understood to import so solemn a declaration of the person's judgement of his own conduct, the child of God, whose heart sincerely consents, would often not dare to make such a declaration. To give force to the objection, it should be supposed that the person knowingly dissembles: That he publicly engages, only to save appearances, and to impose upon others for some purpose or other, while he explicitly and formally resolves in his heart, he will not cleave to the Lord to serve him, but walk after the imagination of his own evil heart; but this is not to be allowed in this case. The person is supposed to set the terms of the covenant in view, consider the claim God has to him, and the obligations redeeming love lays upon him; sets himself, from conscience of duty, to present himself before the Lord, and attempt to give the consent of his heart; and wishes, upon some principle or other, there was such an heart in him. Thus far an unregenerate sinner may go; and however his heart fails in this matter, yet he constitutes a real engagement which binds him to accept of Christ, and be the Lord's forever. To this, God, angels and men are witnesses. If these things be duly considered, the objection vanishes; and it will appear, the unregenerate sinner is not

more chargeable with perjury in receiving the sacraments, than with lying in prayer, but would any one persuade him, by all means, not to dare to pray?

It is often objected, that the unregenerate, when they partake of sacraments, put a seal to a blank.

Ans. If the sacraments were primarily, and only seals of a personal interest in the covenant, there would be weight in the objection. But while the sacraments, in the use of them, even by the unregenerate, do really seal the truth and certainty of the covenant of grace, in its true tenor, on God's part; and on the communicant's part a solemn engagement, binding on his conscience, to embrace this covenant, with all his heart, and will stand firm against him, for his aggravated condemnation, if he does not; it is very far from being a seal to a blank.

Again, it will be said, if the sacraments were converting ordinances, then all should attend upon them as well as prayer, hearing the word, &c. but as they are only sealing, and not converting ordinances, the case is otherwise.

Ans. All this is *gratis dictum*, a mere assertion without proof. For my part, I know not how divines have come by this distinction of ordinances into converting and non-converting. I do not know any ordinance of the gospel, which is not a converting ordinance. Surely that the sacraments are seals, does not hinder, but promotes their tendency to the conversion of sinners. I think, we have no way to know, that any ordinance is a converting ordinance, but from its native tendency to

that end; and its being used by God for that purpose. Now, what stronger tendency can there be, to bring home sinners to God, than the exhibition the sacraments give of Christ; of the way of salvation through faith in his blood; of the grace of God, and the stability of the new covenant? Their very design is to engage men to come to a point, and to close in with the terms of salvation proposed in the gospel.

If it be said, it will then follow, that the profane and scandalous ought to be admitted to the sacraments, that they may be converted.

Ans. So far from it, that directly the reverse is the consequence. This is one circumstance, from whence arises the strong tendency of sacraments to convert sinners, viz. That they secure and promote the visible holiness and external purity of the church, and thereby distinguish her from the world. They thus assert the necessity of true holiness, and point it out as the distinguishing character of God's people; but the force of this argument would be lost, if no such distinction was made. Yea, not merely be lost, but sinners would be greatly encouraged to continue secure in sin.

It is an objection of great weight with some, that to admit unregenerate men to sacraments, and teach them that they are bound to come, tends to flatter their vain hopes, make them secure, and build them up in self-righteousness. To make out this consequence, it is alleged, we must, in this case, proceed upon this principle, viz. That some unregenerate men have some good principles, some sincere regard for, and liking to God

in his proper character; are in heart friendly to the way of salvation by Jesus Christ; have some real and proper desires for holiness (from a view of its excellency, or for its own sake, I suppose) and an interest in Jesus Christ; (which would be, I think, to suppose they were not unregenerate, and so would be a contradiction in terms) and that God so far approves and accepts them, as on that ground to enter into covenant with them.

Ans. I think, it will appear from the whole I have said in the preceding pages, that the matter depends on no such principle. The acceptableness of the persons and duties of even the holiest saints on earth with God, is not at all the ground or reason of his entering into covenant with them. So far from it, that their acceptance with him is founded in the covenant of grace, and provided for by it. To alledge otherwise, would be to take the Arminian side of the question indeed.

I readily grant the unhappy state and character of all unregenerate sinners; they are at enmity with God, and have no holy dispositions, but are wholly depraved: But is that any reason why the great God, their rightful sovereign, shall not demand their immediate submission and return to him? He offers his mercy, and requires their return in a way of covenant, and that transacted in a visible public manner. For this purpose he instituted sacraments, that they may render the covenant visible, and be a visible expression or token of consent. This transaction, and that with the whole heart, he requires without delay. Unregenerate though they be, yet since it is in the way of his own institutions he meets with sinners, they are to stretch out the withered hand, and

and attempt obedience. It is the careless admission of the profane and scandalous, and the unfaithfulness of ministers in neglecting to lay matters fairly before people, and address the conscience with the arguments arising from this topic, that depreciates the sacraments, and promotes security and self-righteousness. Instead of the consequences above-mentioned, there would be the strongest tendency to convince and awaken the conscience, and affect the heart, upon supposition of the following things, viz. that discipline, whereby the openly irreligious and profane are to be kept off, be duly exercised. That ministers deal faithfully with the conscience, set the terms of the covenant fairly before people, shew them that a consent to these is required in attending the sacraments, and nothing short of it will be accepted; that if their hearts refuse, they will grievously sin, and be found guilty before God; yet they may not neglect his institutions without ADDING to their guilt by open disobedience. That they awaken them to look to, and carefully examine their hearts before and after such solemn transactions; and press them to consider their awful guilt, if their hearts are found wanting: Yet shew them, they are under the bond of the covenant; are bound in conscience to seek an interest in Christ with incessant anxiety, and yield up their hearts to God; and that, in the great day of account, they will be dealt with as covenant-breakers if they do not. Yea, those injurious consequences rather follow on the other side of the question: For, on that state of the case, such unregenerate sinners as come to sacraments, look upon their admission as a ground of confidence that they are true christians; and thinking they are safe, sit down secure. Such

as look upon themselves as unprepared, apprehending they are not under a necessity of acting, conclude to neglect it, and so dismiss any further care about preparation, and think themselves more at liberty to indulge their corruptions through the course of life. Thus a sense of obligation by virtue of their baptism is much destroyed.

I presume I have now taken notice of the most weighty objections to my sentiments, and by removing them, have gone, at least, a good length towards evincing the truth of what I have advanced. However, there remain sundry arguments, which to me appear conclusive on the affirmative side of the question; these I shall here take liberty to propose,——And

First. All those, who are convinced that the christian religion is true, are immediately obliged to embrace and openly profess it; this is almost a self-evident proposition. For to suppose otherwise, would be to suppose, that the blessed God had made known his will, and proposed a system of religion, which yet men, convinced of its truth, were at liberty to reject; and this would be the same thing, as to say he had not a rightful authority to oblige them; the very mention of this shews the glaring absurdity. Now it necessarily follows, that if such persons are immediately bound to embrace the true religion, they are immediately bound to profess it, *i. e.* publicly consent to it; for, when religion is publicly proposed, not to profess and avow it, is openly to disavow and reject it; there is no medium. It is the most flat contradiction to imagine we embrace the true religion, and at the same time, openly neglect and disavow it.

it. But I have already shewed, that to embrace the true religion is to enter into covenant with God; without consenting to the covenant of grace, there is no such thing as embracing religion: So to profess religion is openly and visibly to transact that covenant; and this is done in the participation of the sacraments, and not otherwise. There is no full formal profession of religion antecedent to this; for without it, none are visibly in covenant, unless they can be visibly in covenant without ratifying and sealing it. In this point of view, I think, the scripture sets the matter, *Acts*, ii. 37, 38. *Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their hearts, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins.* The apostle had laid before them the evidence of Christ's being the true Messiah, from the fulfilment of antient prophecies concerning him in his resurrection from the dead. The consequence was, they were convinced of the truth of christianity, and of their aggravated guilt in the crucifixion of the Lord of Glory, full of anxiety, they enquire what to do. The answer is, *repent and be baptized, i. e. enter into covenant with God, publicly transacting and ratifying it by the seal of baptism.* If it be said, here is the order, first repent, and then be baptized— I answer,

First, This is no more than I have insisted on, as necessary to be done, viz. To set before persons the nature of true religion and the terms of salvation, and let them know that a cordial compliance with all this is required,

and nothing short of it will do. This is fully consistent with what I have said, and this they are to profess in their baptism. Nor do they visibly profess repentance, while they stand back from this ordinance. 2d. Though they are called upon to repent, there is not the least hint that they were to deter their baptism until they should have evidence, on which they might judge they had saving repentance. They were immediately to offer themselves to baptism, and were forthwith baptized; and in consequence thereof, they went on in the constant attendance on all other ordinances, *they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread (i. e. the participation of the Lord's supper) and in prayer, ver. 41. 42.* Also, *Acts*, viii. 27, Philip tells the Eunuch, if thou believest with all thine heart thou mayst (be baptized.) The Eunuch does not pronounce whether his ^{heart} was saving or not, but only professes a belief of that foundation truth, *that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*, and on this declaration he was baptized.

The heathen are not immediately obliged to embrace the christian religion, but first to enquire into it; but such as are instructed and convinced in their judgement and conscience of the truth of religion, are under a necessity of acting one way or other about it, either to profess or reject it. This is one design of the institution of sacraments, that the persons may be reduced to this necessity. What then shall they do? If they apprehend they are still unregenerate, shall they, for that reason, openly reject it? This is to go against the dictates of their own consciences; or shall they publicly profess their

their belief of it, consent to its obligation upon them, and resolve to appear on the side of religion? One would think it very easy to decide on this case, and determine which side was safest, and attended with least guilt.

Arg. 2. All baptized persons are, thereby, bound to perform all the duties of true christians, as they shall become capable and have an opportunity, both as to internal exercises, and external actions. I say, as they shall become capable; for the greater part are baptized in infancy. But these, as well as all others, are brought under the bond of the covenant. This should be early said before them, to let them see, that, by this dedication to God, they are bound to perform all duties of religion for which they have capacity, to receive instruction, and appear for religion as the professors thereof. As soon as they have a competency of knowledge, and are capable of the discipline of the church, they are bound to commemorate the death of Christ, and renew their engagements to him at his table, unless regularly debarred by discipline for unchristian conduct. When they shall become parents, they are bound to dedicate their children to God in baptism. In one word, they are bound to continue steadfast in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread and prayer. To say that baptism, even when received in infancy, does not bind to all this, is to say, they are not bound by this covenant to all christian practice, till they come to the Lord's table; that they are not obliged to consider themselves as professors of religion in consequence of their baptism, and that they are not chargeable with breach of covenant in neglecting to appear for it, and standing

standing back from the Lord's supper; and that is, I think, to represent infant-baptism as a matter of no great benefit or importance. Or, they are hereby bound to all other christian duties, but not to come to the Lord's table! Where is the ground or scripture authority for that distinction? Is there any qualification requisite for this duty, different in kind from what is required in other duties? Is not true grace or holiness required in all other duties, as well as this? And is not this ordinance among the *all things, whatsoever he has commanded his disciples*, and which they are to be taught to observe? Or, does the unregeneracy of any, who, according to God's own institution, are visible members of his church, nullify this obligation, so that their omission of this ordinance is not their sin? If it be said, as indeed it frequently is, that they are, its true, bound by the divine command, and non-attendance on the Lord's table is their sin; yet such is their disqualification, that they sin more, and contract greater guilt by coming, than staying away; so that, upon the whole, it is safer for them to abstain. I answer, if there is any weight in the objection, it will hold equally with respect to all the other duties of religion; for such are equally disqualified for the performance of them; and so the unregenerate are at once set free from all obligation, as visible church members or baptized persons, to the law of God. A consequence, which I believe few, but the disciples of Sandiman, will choose to admit; besides, this objection is self-contradictory. For if they sin more in coming, and upon the whole it is safer to abstain, it must be, because it is not the will of God they should attempt to obey him with respect to this ordinance:—

They are excepted from the command to observe it ; if so, they are under no obligation to observe it. To abstain is, therefore, so far from being their sin, as this objection supposes, that it is their duty, they do right. For to suppose two contradictory obligations to take place at the same time, by the same law, is a gross contradiction ; for they either mutually destroy each other, or, at least, the one of them makes the other void. And to suppose a present obligation, and yet that the safest course is to counteract or violate it, is a glaring absurdity.

Arg. 3. The authority of God, instituting and appointing sacraments in his visible church, is the ground and reason of the obligation on visible church members to observe them ; and his command to observe them, is the rule of their duty, and not any internal qualification in them : Therefore, all visible church-members are immediately obliged to attend upon them, let their internal state be what it will. The internal qualification required in attendance on sacraments, cannot be the ground or condition of the command to attend upon them ; for God requires and commands the qualification itself, however destitute of it many may be. Surely he, who has a right to command the qualification, has a right to command immediately and absolutely, the performance of the duty itself, in which such qualification is required, whether the persons be possessed of it or not. Consequently, all who share in the visible character, to which the sacraments, by appointment belong ; *i. e.* all visible church-members, stand immediately obliged to attend upon them, and that with the qualification required, whether they actually have it or not. They stand obliged

ged to this in the same manner, as they do to any other duty of religion : Now the divine command in the case is the rule, the only rule of their duty ; and if the command extend to all visible church-members, then it is an explicit rule which can be applied with certainty. But, upon this principle, viz. that the command to attend sacraments is so limited and qualified, as to exclude and prohibit all visible church-members who are unregenerate ; it will be impossible to apply it with certainty in many cases ; for then, the rule of interpretation must be some judgement of people's internal states ; none, whose judgement deserves any notice, alledge that church officers can judge in that case, for they know not the hearts of others, and therefore many ministers don't require any account of their exercises from those they admit ; but only a profession of having, so far as they know their own hearts, embraced Jesus Christ, and given themselves up to God, upon which they are admitted. Now this profession is only a declaration of their opinion or judgment of their exercises of heart, or internal state. Consequently, the party's own judgment, in this case, is the rule of interpreting and applying the divine command ; and according to this they are to conduct themselves. In this declaration, they place that profession of true religion, or their being visibly the people of God, which is required in order to their admission. But surely, we have nothing made visible here, but their judgement of themselves. Pray how does this render their profession of religion more visible, than their acknowledging the doctrines of the gospel as divine truths, and manifesting their influence, by a practice agreeable to them ? Nothing does this, short of publicly transacting a covenant

a covenant with God in the way of his own appointment, *i. e.* by partaking of the signs and seals of his covenant. Such a judgement of themselves, would be as precarious a ground of conduct to persons in coming to sacraments, as any judgement formed of them would be to church-officers in admitting them. For besides, that many judge favourably of themselves, without sufficient ground to support it, and so mistake their case; there are others, who, though really the children of God, are in great suspense, and cannot determine on which side the evidence preponderates; while not a few, though at seasons they have comfortable hopes, yet frequently labour under distressing apprehensions that they have nothing more than common grace. Upon this footing, I think, persons, who doubt of their gracious state, cannot with safety come to sacraments at all. For though they are told the sacraments are appointed to strengthen weak faith, and cherish weak grace; yet that is the matter in question, whether they have any true grace. The most plausible thing that can be said to them is, that if upon impartial self-examination, they find stronger ground of hope than the contrary, they are to follow the strongest evidence. But here, even to a child of God, the ground of doubt may often seem strongest; and though at times he may have hopes, yet, perhaps, he more frequently fears his hopes are false; and that in case, he is told, he will contract greater guilt by coming than staying away.— How then shall he run so awful a risk, when he fears that is more probably his sad condition? Hence probably, yea, in many cases doubtless, the exercised christian is kept off, while the secure self-flattering sinner comes forward; yea, the doubting christian cannot be certain,

that

that the command so limited and qualified as aforesaid, includes him.

Arg. 4. If unregenerate visible church-members contract greater guilt by abstaining from sacraments than in coming to them, then they ought not to abstain. But they do contract greater guilt by abstaining; therefore, they ought not.

Here, to prevent mistakes, I would observe, I mean coming in a conscientious manner, otherwise, if persons should come to the Lord's table merely to qualify for a civil post, or in a profane manner, they would contract much the greatest guilt in coming. This would be to eat and drink unworthily with a witness, and to be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But to return.

I suppose the major proposition will not be denied by any. For if unregenerate visible church-members contract greater guilt by abstaining, which is the same thing as to say they sin more; then certainly in coming, from a conscience of duty, attempting obedience to the divine command, they are less sinful, and consequently act more as they ought to do, than in omitting it. The only thing, therefore, to be confirmed is the minor proposition, *viz.*

That such unregenerate sinners do sin more, and contract greater guilt by abstaining.

I readily grant, that by their unbelief in so solemn a transaction, which in its very nature so specially requires faith in Christ; they sin and contract great and aggravated guilt. Their want of grace renders them altogether

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ther unacceptable to God, he disapproves them. The only question is, whether in omitting, they do not yet more, and God does not more highly disapprove them?

Now, in order to decide on this question, let it be considered, that it is not to be supposed the blessed God when he instituted these ordinances, left men at liberty to neglect them. All of the general character to which the sacraments are appointed, are obliged, by their institution, to observe them. But to suppose it to be the will of God, that such as are unregenerate, though visible church-members, should not approach to sacraments under the notion of being disqualified, is inconsistent with any present obligation to attend upon them; that is to suppose that the institution of ordinances obliges only when men are suitably disposed towards them; their want of faith and other graces sets them free, that their non-attendance upon them adds nothing to their guilt; yea, in that they obey God, and do what is right, which is an absurdity, that, I believe, will not pass with but small reception; but if they are under a present and continual obligation to attend upon the sacraments, by virtue of their authoritative institution, that not to attend upon them is disobedience. In either case, if a gracious heart is wanting; but in the omission of an external duty, another instance of disobedience is added; keeping back the heart is, as it were, avowed, and no attempt is made to yield it up. Surely to act according to the light of conscience, impressed with a sense of present obligation, must be less sinful, and infer less guilt, than to go against the dictates of conscience, and live

the neglect of a known duty. Even when persons abstain, in a sort, conscientiously from a reverence of the ordinance, and consideration of their unfitness, however that may extenuate the guilt of their omission, yet such an error in judgement cannot alter the nature of things, and take away all addition to their guilt thereby, or render their conduct innocent.

But to neglect the sacraments from a careless neglect of religion, and unwillingness to come under strict obligations to it, is sinning with a high hand. It is to say with proud Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice? *Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness as iniquity and idolatry.* 1 Sam. 15. 23. Surely none will hesitate to determine, that a conscience impressed with a sense of duty, and tenderly influencing to the performance thereof, is better, and discovers a less degree of wickedness and impiety, than such a contempt of religion and stubborn temper of mind. Thus, I think, the minor proposition is confirmed, and therefore the conclusion stands good.

Arg. 5. That God should institute public covenant signs and seals to be administered in his church, on purpose to bring the whole visible church, in the celebration of them, to enter publicly into covenant with him; and consequently, require the whole visible church to attend upon them, is perfectly agreeable to his conduct towards the Jewish church in repeated instances: Notwithstanding their sacramental covenanting in circumcision and the passover, that nation was exceedingly prone to idolatry, which they mingled with the true worship of the true God. Their temptation hereto arose from the practice

tice of the heathen nations round about them. To prevent this, and in order to their avouching the Lord more explicitly as the only true God, and renunciation of idols, Moses, Joshua, Nehemiah and Ezra, undoubtedly by divine direction, led the whole people to a covenant-transaction. Upon which I beg leave to observe,

1. That a holy cleaving to God with all the heart; gracious closing in with, and consenting to his covenant, was as really, and as much required in these transactions, as in coming to the Lord's table. In this view Joshua sets the matter before the congregation of Israel. Joshua 24. 19. 20. *And Joshua said unto the people, ye cannot serve the Lord; for he is a holy God, he is a jealous God, he will not forgive your transactions, nor your sins. If ye forsake the Lord and serve strange Gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he has done you good.* As if he had said, consider the pure and holy character of the great God with whom you have to do, in a very solemn manner; and consequently, the holiness of that service he demands of you, and now requires your covenant engagement to practise. It is no easy matter to approve yourselves to him in this affair: And terrible will be the consequence of turning aside from that constant holy obedience he requires. In short, he sets before them the requisitions of the great God in that transaction, in the same solemn pungent manner that ministers of the gospel are to do in administering the sacraments of the New Testament. It is not holiness in a diminutive sense that he requires; it is the holiness of true saints. Yet,

2. He requires all Israel to enter into this covenant, and

and brings them under engagements to this holiness, without standing to enquire whether they are already regenerated or not.—He does not admit them to this covenant transaction, from a judgement of their appearance to be regenerate, upon a previous profession; but presses upon them to choose the Lord for their God, by an induction of facts, as so many striking arguments to persuade them; and their yielding and actually consenting to the covenant then proposed, was itself the profession of holiness they made. It was by that they appeared to be a holy people. No doubt a number of them were unregenerate, but Joshua does not consider that as an obstruction in the way. He considers them as rightfully the Lord's, and however depraved in consequence of their apostasy, and the forfeiture they were under, yet he justly requires them to be holy; and upon this principle, consistently commands their performance of all those external duties in which this holiness is professed, and required to be exercised: And consequently, requires them to profess and engage to it in a solemn covenant-transaction. By a parity of reason, all this is still required of all visible church-members, and they are consistently required to profess and engage to it—by the participation of the sacraments of the New-Testament. And in thus entering into covenant, the visible church appears as much, and as really now to be a holy people, as Israel did then. It is as much the duty of gospel ministers now to lead forward the whole church to covenant-transactions with God, in the solemn ordinances he has appointed for that very purpose, as it was the duty of Moses and others to bring the people of Israel to such verbal covenanting then, which imported the same profession, and as much required true holiness.

Arg. 6. The steady attendance of all regular members of the visible church upon the sacraments of the New-Testament, greatly tends to promote, and give efficacy to the discipline of the church; and thereby one great end of their institution will be obtained. Consequently, it is the will of God that all such should attend upon them.

I have already observed, that the very existence and efficacy of discipline depends upon the sacraments. The weight of censure upon the conscience of an offender, arises from his considering the enjoyment of sacraments, and standing among God's visible covenant-people as a great privilege, which he would otherwise have a right to, but now is cut off from, in consequence of his own offensive conduct. But if he is taught, that as an unregenerate person he would have no right to them, were he never so regular, or externally religious; and that it is so far from being a privilege to him, that it would exceedingly increase his guilt, should he dare to approach; then the argument is lost. Upon that principle, he is not cut off from any thing he had a right to, or had any thing to do with. When a scandalous person is judicially dealt with, and upon conviction, sentence is pronounced, viz. that he is debarred from the Lord's table, what is done to him? In consequence of the instruction he had all along received, he had no thoughts of asking admission. He observes too, his very sober neighbour, who is not only orthodox in his sentiments, but conscientiously religious in his practice, stands off as unfit to come: Yea, the officers of the church are not free to admit him, because he apprehends after all, he is unregenerate. Is it then any blot upon him to be in the same

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case with his reputable neighbour? Does the aforesaid sentence bring any evil upon him, more than he would be under without it?

Upon this principle, that none but gracious persons ought to approach, the sacraments are considered as designed to distinguish between the regenerate and unregenerate members of the visible church (which yet can never be done in this state) rather than as public badges of distinction between the visibly holy and profane, the church and the world. Hence, not the vicious only, but conscientious externally religious persons, are kept off from communion with the church. Now pray, to what class of mankind do these belong? They cannot well be numbered with the heathen, or the openly wicked? They some how belong to the church, yet are not esteemed proper members, and may not come to sacraments more than the heathen; how then can the sacraments make distinction between the church and the world?—What does it signify to an obstinate offender, who will not hear the church, though you esteem him as a heathen man and a publican, while he sees so many of his apparently religious neighbours, upon the matter, in the same case? thus discipline is depreciated and weakened. But surely this is not according to the will of God; but rather that conduct of visible church members, which will maintain and support discipline.

These arguments, I think, abundantly confirm the truth of what I am maintaining, viz. That all who are convinced of the truth of the christian religion, and the obligation of its duties, are immediately bound to join themselves to the Lord and his church; and all baptized persons

persons

persons, who have arrived to a competent capacity, are bound to come to the Lord's table.—I shall conclude the whole with a few general observations.

Observation 1. From what has been said, we observe, upon what footing the visible church is called a *holy, a special people to the Lord.* Deut. 7. 6. *A holy nation.* Exod. 19, 6. *Holiness to the Lord.* Jer. 2, 3. *Saints.* Psal. 79, 2, and 89, 5, 7. And very commonly, *the Lord's people.* It is from the covenant-transactions which have passed between God and them, whereby they stand related to him, and dedicated to his service, for the purposes of holiness; and not from any previous appearance of holiness, as the ground of their admission thereto.—Whatever awakenings, humiliations, or affections, may be effected by the word amongst sinners, it is never to purpose, till they reject sin, and cleave to God by covenant. And therefore, nothing short of public covenanting is a visible sign of holiness, as before observed. From the solemnity of such transactions in their very nature, and the affecting arguments and considerations usually urged on such occasions, persons are commonly excited to much seriousness, which exhibits a more striking appearance of holiness, than on any other occasion. Hence saith the Lord, *I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, and the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.* *Israel was holiness to the Lord.* Jer. ii. 2, 3.

Obj. 2. We may hence observe with what propriety the sacred scriptures require of all, who have been entered as members of the visible church by circumcision of old, or baptism now, that they live to God in the ex-

ercise

ercise of universal holiness of heart and life; and urged by all the arguments belonging to the character of God's children: Such as that he is their God; they are his people; the redemption of Christ; the rich grace and love of God; and the glories of heaven.—The great God addresses them in his word, not according to his knowledge of their real internal state as the searcher of hearts, but according to their external character and visible appearance, and the obligations they are brought under. Hence their sins are highly aggravated and deeply resented, as a contradiction to their public character; and so reflecting great dishonour upon the name and ways of God. *Isaiab, 63, 8, 9, 10.* *For he said surely they are my people, children that will not lie; so he was their Saviour. In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: In his love and in his pity he redeemed them, and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled, and vexed his holy spirit: Therefore he was turned to be their enemy, and he fought against them.* It is resented as exceedingly offensive, that Israel walked in the *statutes of the heathen*; and aggravated from this circumstance, that it was against the Lord *their God.* *2 Kings, 17, 8, 9;* and that hereby, they rejected *his statutes and his covenant,* v. 15.

Obj. 3. We may see from what has been said, the propriety, and necessity there is, that the ministers of Christ should, in the dispensation of God's word, distinguish characters, and address them to the consciences of men. For though their public character is that of saints, God's children, &c. and accordingly all the ho-

liness of saints is demanded of them; yet the word of God assures us there are hypocrites in Zion, branches in Christ which are withered, foolish virgins amongst the wise, and tares growing among the wheat, in the best state of the church here below. Though the ministers of the gospel cannot distinguish these, personally from true saints, yet they can distinguish the characters which describe the one and the other, whereby the consciences of men may be enabled to discern their own proper character. It is one thing to be visibly a child of Abraham, and another to walk in the saving faith of Abraham. One thing to be a visible saint, another to be really one in the sight of the heart-searching God. Therefore, professors had need to look well to themselves, and examine, and *know themselves whether they be in the faith, and Christ be in them.* And not rest in this, that they have *Abraham to their father.* Hence John the Baptist dealt in so solemn and awakening a manner with those he baptized. *Mat. 3. 7, 8, 9, 10, 12.* In like manner, let every gospel minister accuse himself. Amen.



OBSERVATIONS

ON

REGENERATION;

Wherein the Principle of Spiritual Life, thereby implanted, is particularly considered.

AS no truth is more interesting and important, so none has been more frequently and fully treated in a practical view, by pious writers, than the doctrine of Regeneration. Many have, in this way, very excellently and largely described the happy change, which, by virtue of the supernatural work of the holy spirit, takes place in the whole man. I have therefore no design at present to enter upon a full consideration of the subject; but shall only beg leave to make a few very brief observations, some of which have not been so particularly considered in practical treatises, but yet, perhaps, may be of some use to assist in the right apprehension of, and tend to prevent mistakes about a doctrine, which lies so much at the foundation of all true religion.

Obj. 1. Regeneration is the communication of a principle of spiritual life to the soul of a sinner, naturally dead in trespasses and sins, by the agency of the holy spirit.

I call

I call it principle, not only because it is a beginning of spiritual life, but especially, because it denotes a settled determination of the mind to right activity towards spiritual objects, under a moral consideration of them, whence results every right exercise of heart about divine things. It is the determination of the soul to a holy activity about God and divine things, or to such a kind of action; not from the impulsion of an external force, but an internal active principle; and therefore is justly called life. Life of the most excellent kind. It is the life of life.*

But as our apostacy from God has fixed in us, by nature, a very contrary determination, to a course of sinful action; therefore, while that continues (which will be till some power subdue it) there can be no tendency in the soul to an holy temper. The power of the soul to any activity lies formally in the will. Hence its whole power, by nature, is to sin, and to reject God; for, *the*

carnal

* There is some distinction between a natural and a moral principle of action. The former lies in the very essence of the being to which it belongs, or is a determination to some particular kind of action resulting from its frame or constitution. Thus self-activity, or natural life, which is essential to the soul, is a principle of action in general. A determination to particular kinds of natural action, such as we call instinct in brutes, or reason in men, arise immediately from the existence of natural faculties, or something in the frame or constitution of creatures respectively. But a moral principle is a determination to some particular kind of action, arising from some settled judgment or sentiment in which the will acquiesces. Thus a principle of holy action is the fixed impression of some spiritual truth or truths upon the heart.

carnal mind is enmity against him. Rom. 8, 7. Consequently, some other power must be exerted in order to break this evil determination, and reduce the rebellious creature to a right temper. And that must be a power that has dominion over the will. This new determination, therefore, is from the Almighty agency of the holy spirit, it is he that communicates this new principle of life. Accordingly it is every where ascribed to him in scripture. *John iii. 3.- 5. and 6. 63. Tit. iii. 5.*

Obf. 2. This principal of spiritual life, and the manner of its communication, are not immediately in themselves perceptible.

As Adam did not perceive when God breathed into his nostrils the breath of natural life, but perceived its existence and nature from its activity and effects: So the existence and nature of spiritual life are known only by the experience the christian has of its exercise and efficacy. In this view, our Lord observes. *Joh. iii. 8. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth: So is every one that is born of the spirit.* There are, indeed, who greatly abuse this passage, thence flattering themselves, that they may be the subjects of regeneration without perceiving any great change in their hearts and lives. But this is not only foreign to the sense of the place, but contradictory to it. For the wind is very sensibly perceived. The design of our Lord seems to be to remove Nicodemus's surprize at the mysteriousness of the doctrine, by shewing him it is a supernatural work, performed by the holy spirit as a gracious sovereign: To which the sinner himself is so far from contributing

contributing any thing, that he is not so much as sensible of the article of communication, nor perceives the manner of the holy spirit's operation.---*Q. d.* There are mysteries in nature which you cannot account for. You cannot immediately perceive the origin of the wind, nor account for its ceasing when once in motion, or perceive the reason why it continually, and often very suddenly changes its direction. You hear the sound, and feel the effects, but it is only by observations on these sensations, either made by yourself, or suggested by others, that you can infer any conclusions about its nature or cause. Why then should you be surprised to find mysteries in the manner of divine operations, when performing works of grace? In this new-birth, a man can only perceive the exercises of divine life in his heart; and by scriptural observations on these, infer what sort of a life he lives, or form conclusions about its nature and principle. For any one therefore, to pretend to tell what the principle of divine life is, antecedent to all exercises of life in the heart, and undertake from thence to demonstrate and explain those exercises, is a vain attempt. When he distinguishes this life from all its exercises, and goes about to tell us what it is antecedent to them all, he must talk in the dark about a certain something, of which he has no idea. To give it a name, to call it, for instance, a new temper or taste, is not to tell us what it is. Let any man explain what he means by a new or holy temper, without including some exercise of life in the heart, if he can.

Obs. 3. Regeneration and conversion, strictly taken, are not distinct things; but these different denominations, express the same thing under different views.

I say

I say conversion strictly taken: For largely taken, it includes the first exercises of the several graces of the holy spirit, which are but the various modifications of the same principle of spiritual life, such as justifying faith, hope, joy, zeal, sorrow for sin, &c. From which regeneration, (tho' the term is often also used in the same latitude, yet) is so distinct in a strict sense, as to be altogether antecedent, not only in the order of nature, but of time too. But strictly taken, conversion is the actual submission or turning of the soul to God in the most simple notion of it. This may perhaps, lie in the soul's submitting itself into the hands of divine sovereignty, as most fitly having a right to do with him as he pleases: Or in a supreme regard to God as a most glorious being, and rightful Lord. Now this, when considered as the effect of the holy spirit's agency, enabling, or causing the soul to turn to God, is called regeneration; but when considered as an activity essential to spiritual life, and formally as the soul's act, it is called conversion; but these are the only different views, and respects of the same thing. For regeneration undoubtedly denotes a moral effect produced by the spirit of God. But this effect, which he produces, is the soul's turning to God. Surely nothing short of this can be called the new birth. Regeneration is the implantation of holiness in the heart. Now certainly, there can be no real holiness without turning to God: The soul that has not turned to God, is still, without controversy, unregenerate. Hence it follows,

Obs. 4. That this principle wrought in the soul in regeneration, is not something antecedent to every act and exercise

exercise of holiness, but includes in it, or is a first act or exercise of holiness, of the same nature with all the exercises of holiness that follow after, through the course of life.

To cause life is to cause action; for activity is essential to the idea of life. When the holy spirit regenerates a sinner, he communicates an active principle; otherwise it were not life: But to talk of an active principle existing in the soul absolutely without action, would be a contradiction; now this action must be cleaving to God. Hence arises,

Obs. 5. A fifth observation, viz. that this principle of spiritual life consists in, or includes some new view of the mind, and determination or approbation of the will.

This must be the case, because it is a moral principle; otherwise, it could not be the principle of a course of moral action; when therefore, a principle of spiritual life is implanted, a moral effect is produced; but that effect which includes no acts of the understanding and will, but is absolutely antecedent to them, must be a mere physical, and not a moral effect, and then to regenerate, would be to create in a physical, not a moral sense.

I think, the sacred scriptures set the matter in the same light with the above observation. Sometimes this happy change is expressed by the term Light. Eph. v. *Ye were sometimes Darkness, but now are ye Light in the Lord.* Sometimes it is represented under the notion of being made willing. Psal. cx. 3. *Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.* Either of these expressions

includes the other. Thus, when the regenerate are called *light*, the matter is not confined to the understanding only, but includes the approbation of the will, and to be willing, certainly, includes the view of the understanding; for there can be no act of the will without it; sometimes both are set in view together; as, Acts xxvi. 18. *To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of satan to God.* Certainly to open the eyes, and turn from darkness to light, is to enlighten the understanding, and to turn to God is an act of the will. To the same purpose is, 2 Cor. iv. 6. *For God hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* To see the glory of God, must include both the view of the understanding, and the approbation of the will. It is no objection to this, to say, these scriptures speak of this change largely taken. For admitting that, yet it is not by way of contra-distinction from, or exclusive of the first instance; but the first existence of life comes under the same predicament. Thus they, who were sometimes darkness, are not said to be enlightened only but to be *light*. God in the new creation, shines into the heart, in a manner analogous to his shining in the natural world, when he created light in it. It is very easy to say, that in regeneration, a holy temper is produced whence this knowledge and volition arise; but perhaps, it would not be so easy to tell, in that connection, what we are to understand by that temper. Surely we are not to conceive of a moral, in the same manner as of a natural temper. In the latter, we take into the consideration such a certain, yet various construction of the human frame, as is apt to produce such

and such passions and feelings of nature. Now, if we have an idea of the former, any thing like this, we must then consider it only as a new faculty created in the soul, and has nothing moral in it, any more than the understanding or will considered as natural faculties. But if we conceive of it as a moral determination of the soul towards God, then we must consider it as including some apprehension of God in the understanding, and an act of the will embracing him, which brings the matter to what I have said. Thus we are, as it were, insensibly led to some apprehension of what this divine principle is, or wherein it consists, though we cannot comprehend the manner of the holy spirit's operation in producing it, or explain how it exists. It is an experimental practical knowledge of God, or it is a new view of the infinite perfections of God, with the approbation of them in the will as most excellent; or, which is, indeed, the same thing under its proper denomination, it is a supreme love to God: Supreme love to God, is the very essence of true religion. Hence it is called *the fulfilling of the law*. Rom. xiii. 10. Our Lord mentions love to God and our neighbour as the sum and substance of the whole law. *Mat. xxii. 37, 38, 39, 40.* No action can be called true obedience, if it don't flow from love to God, and every exercise of true grace may be reduced to this as its principle.

Obj. 6. The holy spirit makes use of the word of God as a mean in the work of regeneration, which he renders irresistably efficacious for that purpose.

I am far from thinking with the Arminians, that the only influence of the holy spirit in this matter lies in

what they call moral suasion; that is, as I understand it. The holy spirit having set before us the arguments and motives of the gospel in the word, both by his Providence, and an influence upon the mind, excites its attention to these things, and assists the natural faculties in weighing those arguments and motives, and thus strives to persuade the sinner to a compliance with gospel overtures, but still leaves it with himself to yield to, or reject those arguments by a sovereign act of his own will. According to this, it is only an objective light that is set before the mind, as contained in the word; a representation of objects, as yet at a distance, of which the mind has no knowledge but by the report and description of the word; and perhaps the most, if not all the light, which is usually called common illumination, may be obtained this way.

Nor can I agree with some, even eminent Calvinistic divines, that there is only a gradual difference between common and saving illumination; I believe there is a specific difference: there is in regeneration a subjective light created in the soul, which, though it is the knowledge of a glorious object presented to the mind, yet may fitly be called subjective in respect of the manner of its communication, as contra-distinguished from, tho' not opposed to the mere objective light of the word before described; it is an immediate intuitive sense, or knowledge of the moral perfections and character of God, not gained by way of conclusion from premises, or by argumentation, but arising from the approach of God to the soul, by way of gracious presence; he thus takes possession of the heart, and fills it with a sense of himself by

his presence in a peculiar manner ; and this is a way of knowing, very different from that received merely by the description and report of the word ; and therefore a different kind of knowledge, viz. by way of spiritual sense and experience. Tho' we cannot perceive or explain the manner of this divine presence or access to the soul ; yet the fact is abundantly witnessed by the experience of God's people ; notwithstanding, they have an habitual spiritual knowledge of God and divine truths ; yet, at one season, they are distressed with darkness, and cannot get any proper views of God ; at another, they shall be full of light, and astonished with the view of divine glory ; now what is the reason of this vast difference ? Surely, not from any difference in the objective light of the word, or their capacity to meditate upon it. But the reason of it is, the absence of God in the one case, and his glorious presence in the other ; therefore, their first such knowledge of God was from such an approach to the soul, or divine presence in it. And for the reality of this experience in God's people, I refer to the account the sacred scriptures give us sometimes of their bitter complaints of God's hiding himself, and panting for him as the hart for the water brooks ; at other times, of their rejoicing in his beauty and glory, with which they are, as it were transported ; and, I think these words of Job, xlii. 5. *I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee*---fully justify this distinction of objective and subjective knowledge ; for admit that the design of the words is to represent the very lively views he had of the divine excellency, so that comparatively speaking, all his former, even experimental views were but like report ; yet, by a parity

a parity of reason, there is a vast difference between experience in the lowest degree, and report ; and he goes upon this principle,---That report, or by the hearing of the ear, is a very languid and imperfect way of knowing, compared with sight and intimate acquaintance. These are very different kinds of knowledge, as different as the knowledge a man has of a country from an historical account and map of it, or the report of travellers ; and that he has from travelling through, and seeing it himself. Thus then, by this presence of God in the soul, it has a knowledge of him, which it could not possibly have without it, by the most animated descriptions and representations of the word. It was thus, even innocent Adam knew the moral character and excellency of God, not only by objective evidence from without, but also by subjective evidence, from his experience of the divine presence.

But all this does not exclude moral influence by way of argument, the arguments contained in the word ; but rather accounts for their irresistible efficacy. Though mere moral suasion will not do the business, yet it is not excluded ; it is a moral effect that is to be produced : Therefore, it is natural enough to expect that the power producing it should be exerted in a moral way ; and consequently a moral mean with great propriety be admitted.

That this matter may be better apprehended, I beg leave to observe, that the blessed God must be exhibited to the mind as an object of contemplation, in order to any act of the will towards him. The will approves him as most fit and worthy to be chosen, which must be

founded upon the contemplation of him in the mind. Length of time is not, indeed, necessary for this purpose. The operations of the mind are very quick. . . . Were we to suppose an adult, who had no opportunity of the word, to be regenerated; no doubt, a reflection upon his own intuitive perceptions, would exhibit the blessed God to the mind, as an object of contemplation. For it is absurd to suppose a new heart to exist in an adult person without any ideas of God and divine things in the understanding; for that is to suppose a person regenerated, and yet altogether ignorant of God; to turn to God without any knowledge of him, which, I think, is a contradiction, and the same thing as to say, a man is changed without any alteration; the thief on the cross seems to be an instance of the contrary: Tho' he lived in the land of Judea, and had opportunity of the word of God, it is not probable a man of his abandoned character sought any considerable acquaintance with it; yet his speech to his fellow-criminal, and his address to Jesus Christ, shewed very considerable discoveries of God, and the character of his Saviour.

But let it be considered, that with respect to sinners who live under the means of grace, and enjoy the word of God, tho', by reason of their estrangement from God, they have no proper views of divine truths; yet their understandings are possessed of some general speculative knowledge of them; yea, convinced sinners have more, they have such an experimental knowledge of the law convincing them of sin, as is effectual to arouse them out of their fatal security, and confute their false notions, and awaken them to a very solemn attention to the word

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of God. Now in regeneration, the intuitive views, impressed on the mind by the divine presence, are exactly the same with the descriptions and delineations of the divine character in the word. The mind therefore, instead of reflecting immediately upon its own perceptions, looks forward to the word. Now the man's eyes are opened, and he understands the scripture in a manner he never could before; there he sees this glorious object represented as in a glass; from thence the reflection is so strong and lively as irresistably, tho' in a moral way, to determine the will; for surely, it is very apprehensible, that the views of the mind may be so experimental, strong, and full of evidence, that it is impossible for a rational being to withhold the approbation and consent of the will; and thus this divine temper is formed in the heart: In this point of light, I think, the apostle sets the matter, 2 Cor. iii. 18. *But we all with open face beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord.* Tho' these words comprehend the gradual perfecting the image of God, in the progress of the work of grace; yet certainly the first step of the process is in the same way with all the subsequent, in the whole series. Nor does the use of the glass at all derogate from the efficiency of the spirit, in causing and conducting this whole matter; and, indeed, there is as really an immediate agency of the spirit upon the soul, in every progressive perfecting of the image of God, and every instance of the quickening of grace in believers (where yet the concurring instrumentality of the word, notwithstanding, is acknowledged) as there is in the first begetting of the divine life.

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Here I would take notice, how very different this view of divine illumination is from the wild conceits of enthusiasts; their pretended extraordinary discoveries and inspirations consist in unaccountable impulses without the word, the warm flights of imagination, and agitation of their passions: In all this they have no reference to the word of God, but rather set light by it in comparison of their own great light; or else in pretending to the word, put inconsistent ridiculous constructions upon it;—but these intuitive views of God, I mentioned as primarily arising from his presence in the soul, are but the impressions of such truths as the word of God describes; they lead to the scriptures, and give a rational, consistent view of them; this light is tried and judged by the word of God: *To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.* Isa. viii. 20.

I cannot but think the instrumentality of the word in regeneration, in the view I have given of it, is once and again asserted in the sacred scriptures—thus, 1 Pet. i. 23. *Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth forever.* The word, here rendered *born again*, is the same which is used, John iii. 3. of which new birth the word is declared to be an instrument or mean; in the same view, the same apostle tells the christians to whom he wrote, that *by the great and precious promises, they were made partakers of the divine nature.* 2 Pet. i. 4. and to be made partakers of the divine nature is to be regenerated: Another passage, is Jam. i. 18. *Of his own will begat he us with [or by] the word of truth.*

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The word here used, cannot, with any propriety, I think, be understood of any thing else than the first infusion or begetting of spiritual life; when this is said to be done with, or by the word, it must intend that it is used as an instrument or mean; in this view, this blessed change is expressed, by *putting God's law in the inward parts, and writing it in the heart.* Jer. xxxi. 33.

Doubtless the holy spirit could as easily accomplish this great work without using any mean; yet as it appears very plain, he has chosen to do otherwise; we may not only suppose, but readily see great propriety in his making use of the word in this matter: This change is to be tried and judged of by the word; therefore must answer to the descriptions and characters there given, as the impression on the wax answers to the characters of the seal. The views of God in the mind, must be such as exactly agree to the descriptions and representations of him in the word. It was, consequently, very fit that these characters of the word should be impressed upon the soul, as a medium of determining the will in regeneration.

When the holy spirit takes the sinner in hand, in order to bring him home to God; the first step he ordinarily takes, is to convince him of sin, confute his false notions, and slay his legal hopes; in this he makes use of the law as a mean, as all acknowledge. Yet in order to this effectual access of the law to the conscience, there is as really an immediate exertion of power and influence upon the soul, as there is also in regeneration; and tho' this conviction does not make the sinner more worthy of the grace of God, yet the great design of it is

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to prepare the way for the opening of divine truths upon the mind with the brighter evidence, in its passing this saving change; which reflects the image of this glory upon the beholding soul, and determines the will. *2 Cor. iii. 18.---Psal. cx. 3.*

Obj. 7. From this new view of the mind, and determination of the will, or supreme regard to God, result the various exercises of heart, which are called the grace of the holy spirit, and distinguished by particular names, as their proper principle.

From this view of the divine character in the enlightened mind, naturally arises a discovery of the necessity of Christ's satisfaction to divine justice, and the fitness and glory of that way of reconciliation with God. Hence faith in Christ. This plan of mercy still more illustrates the glory of the divine character; for it shines in the face of Jesus Christ; by these views of faith, spiritual affections are excited, sorrow for, and hatred against sin raised; hence an habitual watchfulness against sin and opposition to it, and delight in the service of God; and all this infers a great and permanent change in the whole course of life and action; but practical writers have abundantly explained and described these things; to whom I refer my readers, and shall insist no further upon them here.

I therefore conclude with this general remark, viz. that it is of vastly more importance and concernment to us, to inquire into the reality of a gracious change, as discovered by the alteration, and holy exercises which the regenerate experience; than spend our time and
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zeal in disputing about the principle of spiritual life, wherein it consists, or what it is antecedent to all exercises thereof. While we are warmly interested in deciding the speculative dispute, we are apt to forget the practical consideration of the important subject, and the application of it to ourselves; and those who attend to us are led to treat the matter in the same manner; by this means the interests of vital piety languish. While we justly lament the low state of experimental religion, to devote ourselves to these speculative refinements, will not be found the way to revive it. Experience will always shew, that to keep up a practical view of divine truths, and the solemn application of them in serious pungent addresses to the conscience, is the best calculated for that purpose. Besides, if we lay down, by way of hypothesis, a certain something, of which we can have no idea (as of a principle of life, antecedent to all exercises of life, we cannot; nor can we infer any conclusions about its nature, from any exercises of the heart, if it includeneither idea nor volition, but is something absolutely antecedent to both) then we shall be in danger of a superstructure, as unintelligible as the basis upon which we build. Thus some have wildly dreamed, that the principle of spiritual life may exist in the soul without any act or exercise of life, as a taste, which lies dormant until a proper object be applied to it; and if it may exist thus one moment, why not two? and if two, why not a minute? and so on, till they bring the supposition to hours, days, months, and years; and so a regenerate person may still continue an unbeliever, and of consequence, in an unjustified state: And I see not why it would not be as easy to continue the supposition till death,
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and so send him to hell, with his dormant principle along with him. Thus the cause of vital religion is greatly disserved.

But if we attend to the plain practical views the scriptures give us of this matter, consider the exercises of divine life, which discover the happy change produced in regeneration, and trace these to their first principle, which, from the nature of these exercises, we conclude to be something of the same nature with them; to be a first act of the series of acts or exercises that follow after, which the holy spirit causes the soul to exert; (*i. e.* causes it to live) we are in no danger of any fatal mistake. In this way, the heart will be more likely to feel itself interested; and thus people become more solemn and exercised in examining and judging the state of their own souls; and that this may be more extensively the case among professors, may God of his infinite mercy grant for Christ's sake. AMEN.

A N

E S S A Y

O N T H E

M E A N S *of* G R A C E.

I. **T**HE great God stands in no need of means, in order to accomplish his purposes. He could, if he pleased, cause all events he sees meet to effect, to come to pass in the same way he caused the world at first to exist, viz. by the word of his power or sovereign act of his will; yet it does not at all derogate from his efficiency, but rather serves to illustrate his power, to use means, because all their efficacy upon the effect, is from him. Accordingly it has pleased him, that rational creatures might more distinctly observe his works, to use means, and appoint a connection between them and the end in view, both in the natural and moral world; yet such a connection as always depends upon the divine pleasure. Means are effectual or ineffectual, as he affords or withholds his concurrence; particularly in the administration of his moral government, he deals with the subjects thereof in a way suited to their rational natures, and uses means of a moral nature, in carrying on the interests of religion in our degenerate world. To this purpose, he has given his holy word, appointed a gospel ministry and ordinances of worship, such as the sacraments of the New-Testament, praise and prayer.

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II. These divines commonly call means, not of instruction only, but of grace; the reason is, because it is in the use of these means, the holy spirit, ordinarily communicates or bestows grace on sinners, and builds up his children in holiness, until he brings them safe home to glory. Now, whatever can be considered as a mean with reference to an end, must have some tendency to, and, in its own way, have influence upon, or concur in attaining it; for that which has no such tendency or influence, has no manner of connection with the existence or accomplishment of the end; and consequently is no means of it at all. If, therefore, these ordinances are means of grace, they must have a tendency to, and in the hand of the holy spirit, concurrence in the regeneration and conversion of sinners, and thence forward, in carrying on the work of grace in them. As all ordinances of worship are but various manners of administering the word of God, it is especially to be considered as a mean for these purposes.

III. That we may see with what propriety these are called means of grace, let us attend to what we find ascribed to, or predicated of the word, in the bible; which only can be said of it considered as an instrument or means, and not as an efficient cause; which it cannot be. The conviction of sinners is ascribed to it.—*By the law is the knowledge of sin*—Rom. iii. 20. Peter's hearers, upon hearing his discourse, wherein he proved from the scriptures of the Old Testament, that Jesus, whom they had crucified, was the true Messiah, *were pricked in their hearts*—Acts ii. 37. By this God distinguishes his word delivered by the true prophets, from that delivered

livered by the false, viz. That his word is like a fire, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces—Jer. xxiii. 29. *The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart*—Heb. iv. 12. It kills the legal pride of sinners. *I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.* Gal. ii. 19. I have already taken notice in my observations on regeneration, that christians are said to be *born again, begotten, and made partakers of the divine nature, by the word of God.* 1 Pet. i. 23. Jam. i. 18. 2 Pet. i. 4. to which I would add, *Psal. xix. 7, 8, where the word under the terms law, testimony, and commandments, is said to convert the soul, make wise the simple, and enlighten the eyes; all which terms plainly express the saving change wrought in regeneration. This change is an inscription of the divine law upon the heart. Jer. xxxi. 33. All these expressions signify much more than merely instructing the speculative understanding. They must import the concurrence of the word as a mean or instrument in the hand of the holy spirit, both in the preparatory work of conviction, and also in effecting the saving change in regeneration. It is unnecessary to recite the many passages which represent the word and ordinances as means of quickening, supporting, comforting, sanctifying, perfecting and strengthening of God's people. I would only observe, that the efficacy of the word for these purposes, depends upon the presence and immediate agency of the holy spirit in the heart: which as really takes place in these instances, as in the regeneration of a sinner, and the latter as easily admits the use of means as the former.*

IV. The efficacy of the means of grace lies not in any intrinsic virtue in themselves, nor depends upon the power or will of those who attend upon them; for the effect to be produced is supernatural, to which sinners are by nature entirely averse, and destitute of a true discernment of the excellency of the truths and weight of the arguments proposed in the word; but they are rendered effectual to the attainment of the end, by the blessing of the holy spirit upon them, and his energy in them; they are means in the spirit's hand, rather than the creature's. And sinners are to attend upon them in that view, that they may lie in the way in which the spirit meets with such, and works upon them; like the poor impotent people, who lay at the pool, waiting for the descent of the angel to trouble the waters. *John v. 3. 4.* With respect to creature agents, the application or use of means depends upon them, but the causality itself, or energy of means in order to the end is not in their power, nor depends upon their will. Hence they often fail of success in the use of the best adapted means; but when this divine agent condescends to use means, he causes their efficacy, and makes them effectual when, and with respect to whom he pleases. I say, condescends to use means; for the very circumstance I have mentioned, shews he needs them not; he could immediately will whatsoever he pleases; when, therefore he is pleased to make use of means, it is in order to the more easy discovery of himself to his creatures. Hence it follows, that the great God is not the less an efficient, for his using means, nor the less displays his power in accomplishing the end by them.

V. Yet,

V. Yet, notwithstanding, there is an aptness and tendency in the means, in order to the end in view; otherwise they would not be properly means. Those things which have no aptness or tendency to the attainment of the end, can have no sort of influence upon it; the existence of the end has no kind of connection with them, and consequently there are no means at all of its existence. Now, the aptness or tendency of the word of God to reduce sinners to the obedience of Christ, lies in, *1st.* The clearness of representation, whereby divine truths are set before the mind; divine truths are clothed in the most plain and intelligible language, their sublime nature will allow of; they are descriptively expressed, so as not only to declare their nature, but also to describe their true influence, and the impressions they should make upon the heart. They are also illustrated by the most familiar similitudes. *2^d.* In the interesting manner in which these sacred truths are urged, or the weight of the arguments with which they are pressed home. *3^d.* In the awful authority and great majesty with which they are delivered, whence they bind and affect the conscience; they are set before us with a *Thus saith the Lord or Jehovah*, our rightful Sovereign, with whom is terrible majesty, and your God, who has a covenant claim upon his professing people. Hence, then, when the holy spirit takes the word in his hand, and makes application of it to the heart, it is most apt and fit, as a mean, to instruct the mind and inform the conscience, and thus to convince and awaken the sinner; to lay restraints upon men, and repress, or in some measure, restrain even the natural enmity of the awakened sinner; and when the holy spirit effectually opens the sinner's eyes, and makes

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him understand divine truths as they are represented in the word, they have a most apt tendency, by way of argument, to persuade and determine the will; and to promote the life and exercise of all the graces of the holy spirit, in true christians.*

I have said that when the word is so effectually applied to the conscience as to convict the sinner, it is a means of repressing or restraining his natural enmity. As this will probably be, in a particular manner, called in question, I beg leave to offer a few thoughts further upon it. I do not at all suppose the sinner's enmity is, in this case, subdued; for then he would be regenerated, which is contrary to the supposition. The wickedness of men may, yea, in many instances is restrained, when its governing power is not at all broken.— Hence, *those who were clean escaped from them who live in error, and escaped the pollutions of the world thro' the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, may be allured through the lusts of the flesh and much wantonness, and be again entangled; yea, it too often proves to be the case, that according to the true proverb, the dog is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that washed, to her wallowing in the mire.* 2 Pet. ii. 18, 19, 20, 22. The acting of the sinner's enmity is, indeed, more direct against God and spiritual objects, thus brought near and set in view before him by conviction, and this, no doubt, is a greater aggravation of those exercises of enmity;

* I would here refer the reader to what I have said in the 6th observation on regeneration, concerning the instrumentality of the word therein.

mity; yet it will by no means follow that enmity, as an evil principle in the heart, is more prevalent, or has, in this case, acquired a greater degree of power. The power of this, as well as every other evil habit, lies in the sway and dominion it has in the heart. Enmity reigns in the heart ever while it is destitute of true love to God; but yet the more peaceably it possesses the heart, and the more fully it has its consent, the more powerful it is. While the sinner is in a state of security, though he does not feel so explicit opposition to God in his heart, as being more out of view; yet it is the same principle of enmity that carries him on in casting God's law behind his back; in neglecting the divine service; and giving a loose rein to his corruptions, while he despises, and perhaps derides strict religion. His enmity lords it over him without control, and hardens his heart against reproof and conviction. It is unmolested in its sway, and carries the sinner headlong whichever way it directs; and he justifies himself in all this, and refuses to take blame to himself; but the awakened sinner, while conviction is borne home upon the conscience, confesses the just authority over him, that he has most unjustly trampled upon it, and violated his law; though he has no holy acquiescence in, or choice of the divine government, yet he has a rational conviction that is rightful, and that he deserves punishment for contradicting it; that he feels his heart averse, greatly alarms him, and convinces him of the existence of enmity in his heart. Instead of spurning at his convictions, trampling them under foot, and casting them off, which would be the case if his enmity acquired strength in proportion to his convictions, he cherishes them,

them, and is afraid of falling back into security again. Though he feels rising-of heart, yea, some sinners make some attempts to shake off their convictions, with whom they are too powerful, and are increased till they so break their stout spirits, as that they give up their struggles to fight them, and become afraid lest they should leave them again to fall into an hardened state; yet this is so far from proving the increase of enmity as to strength or prevalence, that, in reality, it proves the restraint of it by the authority of God's law in the conscience, and convincing influences of the holy spirit. Upon a discovery of the exceeding depravity and wickedness of his heart, the sinner, upon some principle, wishes his heart was changed. True, he does not choose holiness or turning to God in itself considered, for that he does not, is one main thing that fills his conscience with so much guilt; yet he earnestly desires there was such a heart in him as did see the beauty of holiness, and truly choose it. He desires this, indeed, upon no higher principle, than a regard to his own happiness. This, where there is no higher, is not an holy principle, nor is this sort of desire of grace such as denotes true grace in the heart; yet it is not, in itself, a wicked principle. That this respect to his own happiness does not regard holiness as an ingredient in it, and is not subordinate to, and under the influence of an higher and more noble principle, is his crime; but that it is in him, and has influence upon him, is not. Surely the sinner's enmity is not as prevalent and unrestrained, when he is thus anxiously solicitous to obtain heart-changing grace, even on this principle, as when he utterly disregarded the matter, and justified himself in refusing to return.

When

When it is said that the awakened sinner still continues to reject Christ, and hate God with all his heart, the meaning must either be, that under all his convictions, the sinner exerts himself to the utmost with all his might in opposition to them; that he the more pours contempt on the gospel, and stoutly resolves to reject Jesus Christ; that he casts about to find out how he may bear himself up in a determined opposition to the gospel overtures of salvation, and the more he is convinced, the more maliciously does he oppose, and impudently justify himself in refusing Christ and his redemption, like the Scribes and Pharisees of old, which would argue the increase of enmity with a witness; and then, the proposition is not true, yea, notoriously contrary to fact. Or else the meaning must only be, that notwithstanding all his convictions and increase of light, his enmity is not at all subdued, but if present restraints were removed, it would return to its old stubborn stoutness in the way of sin; and all the faculties and powers of the soul are still under the reigning power of that hateful principle; and then I have no controversy with any man about it: But this is no way inconsistent with what I have said, unless we say, that to lay restraints upon the lust and corruptions of men, is inconsistent with their dominion in the heart; or else, that they have as great a degree of power under restraints, as when most unrestrained; neither of which, will any man, in the due use of his reason, assert, for that would destroy all ideas of different degrees of wickedness. The sinner's convictions awaken his attention to those glorious objects, God, and his son Jesus Christ, and the way of salvation through him; and thereby the actings of his natural enmity

enmity are more direct and explicit, which, doubtless, more aggravate them as particular acts, and exposes the malignity of that hateful principle. Yet that very discovery, and the sinner's condemning himself for it, and cries to God for deliverance from it, shew that it has not as quiet possession of the heart, and as prevalent energy in it as formerly.—Now it is from the principles, good or bad, which have the governing prevalence in the heart, that persons have their character; a course of action only fixes the character, as it indicates the prevalence of the principle from which such actions flow; and the degree of that prevalence determines the degree of the character, especially in the eye of the heart-searching God; if, then, under solemn convictions by the authority of God's law, and the convincing influences of the holy spirit, the sinner's natural enmity be restrained, it will follow, that the awakened sinner's character is not, on the whole, rendered more vile and odious in the sight of God, than it was in the days of his security and contented course of sin against him.*

—Can it be imagined, that the sinner's enmity has as strong an energy in him when brought to break off from his

* It will by no means follow, that awakened sinners are in a degree accepted to God, on account of their being less sinful than they were in the days of their security; for the divine law still condemns them as falling short, infinitely short of its demands; and their less sinfulness makes no atonement for the smallest past transgression: It only follows, that in their present case, they merit a less degree of disapprobation and punishment; i. e. they are less offensive; and this we must admit, or else deny any different degrees of wickedness; or assert that the lowest degree of wickedness is as offensive, and disapproved in as high a degree as the greatest.

his course of external sins, as when he pursued them with greediness? when he earnestly attends to the duties of religion, as when he neglected them with scorn and contempt, or trifled with them in a listless formality? and when he eagerly seeks the company of God's people asking their advice, as when he hated to be near them, could not bear their conversation, but took delight in the company of the profane and ungodly? but to return;

That the means of grace have a tendency to the conviction and conversion of sinners, as well as the edification of God's people, appears by the exhortations God uses with them in his word, as utterly inexcusable and perverse in continuing impenitents after all the pains he has taken upon them, and means used with them. *Isa. v.* from the beginning of the chapter, the Lord represents the abundant provision he had made for their fruitfulness, in point of means and advantages which he had offered them; on which he exhortates with them.—*v. 4. What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it? wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?* *Jer. vii. 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29. But this thing commanded I them, saying, obey my voice and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: And walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you; but they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and the imaginations of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward. Since the day that your fathers came forth of the land of Egypt unto this day, I have even sent you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them. Yet they*
hearkened

harkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck, they did worse than their fathers. Therefore thou shalt speak all these words unto them, but they will not hearken unto thee: Thou shalt also call unto them, but they will not answer thee; but thou shalt say unto them, this is a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the Lord their God, nor receiveth correction: Truth is perished and cut off from their mouth. Cut off thine hair, O Jerusalem, and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on high places, for the Lord hath rejected and forsaken the generation of his wrath. Here we see, their disobedience to, and abuse of the means he had used with them, was the reason why they were so peculiarly the generation of God's wrath, and of the sad issue of their case.—If it be said, the instruction they get from the word is sufficient to render impenitent sinners inexcusable; I answer, either this light and instruction has a tendency to their conversion (and if this be admitted, the matter is fairly given up) or it has no such tendency at all; and then how does it at all render them inexcusable in continuing impenitent and unconverted?

The conversion of sinners to God is, in a word, the great scope of the means of grace; this the word of God calls for at their hands, commands and presses it with the greatest importunity. It is needless to recite authorities for this to such as are acquainted with their bible, since we might quote a great part of that sacred book to this purpose. Therefore it is, that the gospel ministry is called the ministry of reconciliation, and it is the business of gospel ministers to pray sinners in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God. Yet,

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VI. There is no certain or infallible connection between the most diligent and earnest attendance on the means, that unregenerate sinners are capable of, and their obtaining the saving grace of God. This issue of the matter is entirely from the sovereign mercy of God. If we suppose a certain necessary connection in this case, it must arise, either from the nature of the thing, viz. some constitution or law of nature, or from some promise and positive appointment of God to that purpose; but in the case before us, there is no such connection in either way. Not the former; for the means of grace are positive institutions, and don't fall under the laws of nature; nor do they operate by way of influence upon God, to move him to shew mercy, but are means whereby the blessed God deals with sinners, and works effectually on whom he pleases; their efficacy depends upon his blessing and energy. In this view he has appointed means, and requires fallen men to attend upon them. Guilty sinners lie at mercy, upon which they have no claim, but it lies in the breast of God as a sovereign of his own grace, to shew mercy or not as he pleases; and therefore, according to his sovereign pleasure, he renders the means of grace effectual or not; and as to the latter part of connection, viz. by promise or positive appointment; there is not the smallest evidence of it in the word of God; if there be, let any one shew it, who thinks he can. I must confess, I have not met with one such promise in all the book of God. As to such passages, as Luke xi. 9. and Mat. vii. 7. *Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you.* There the conduct of God as a father towards his children, is plainly spoken of; and therefore,

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fore, asking, seeking, and knocking in faith, asking, &c. in a gracious manner, is intended; and they are the children of God who are spoken of. If the moral efficacy of the means of grace terminated on God, to move him to give grace (the very mention of which shews the absurdity of the supposition) or the sinner's use of them were at all the ground or reason of his shewing mercy; then, indeed, the very appointment of means would imply a promise of success, or something equal to it, in the required use of them; but this is so far from being the case, that on the contrary, the tendency of the means to the end lies in their moral influence upon the consciences and hearts of sinners; yet whatever aptness to such an influence there is in the means of grace, such is the blindness, deadness, enmity and prejudice of poor sinners, that until the holy spirit accompany them with his presence and energy, no such influence will effectually take place in their hearts. Now he works in or by these means as a sovereign; hence he strives with many only in such a way, as that he suffers them still to resist, until in just resentment, he forsakes them: But with respect to the vessels of mercy, he prosecutes his gracious design, until by the *rod of his strength* (the word of his grace) he irresistibly conquers *and rules in the midst of his enemies*. Psal. cx. 2. Therefore sinners are to use the means of grace as creatures lying at mercy, seeking pure grace, which depends on the mighty energy of the holy spirit; but they can found no claim to grace on their most diligent use of said means. It is enough to engage sinners to the use of means, that God has appointed them as such, has required their attendance upon them; there is an aptness in the means

themselves

themselves and a proper tendency, and it is by these means the holy spirit works; in this way he meets with perishing creatures in mercy, and they cannot expect the grace of God in the neglect of his institutions: While there is a *MAY BE the Lord will be gracious* (Amos v. 15.) *an WHO KNOWETH if the Lord will return, and repent, and leave a blessing behind him.* Joel ii. 14. Sinners will be utterly inexcusable in neglecting them, and justly charged with choosing their own destruction.

VII. From what has been said it will follow, as a conclusion on the whole, that all sinners, where the gospel comes, are under the most indispensable obligations to attend the means of grace. The design of their institution as mediums of the spirit's dealing with their souls about their eternal interests, lays them under bonds of gratitude. For why, shall the offended Majesty of heaven, thus seek after rebellious sinners? Would it not then be the basest ingratitude to treat him with neglect? The gracious authority of God binds their consciences, he requires their attendance upon his ordinances; their very institution implies such a requisition, and it will be a disobedience, highly criminal, to neglect them.

We also hence see what ground of encouragement sinners have for their attendance on the means of grace; they have not the assurance of a promise that they shall be successful; the great God has come under no such engagement: They have no ground of present peace and security from their most diligent and earnest use of them. Such apprehensions would lead to, and support a self-righteous spirit, and be an abuse of the means of grace.

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They have great reason of deepest anxiety lest they fail of the grace of God, and provoke the holy spirit to forsake them. Yet they have sufficient motives from the afore said design of their institution; their moral aptness and tendency, whereby they are adapted to our rational natures and the spirit's operations, and suited to affect the hearts of men in a moral way: It is the stated way of the spirit's dealing with the souls of men; by his word and ordinances he strives with sinners, and by the same means he accomplishes his special work of grace; and in this way there is the only probability of meeting with mercy. In the continued neglect of God's ordinance, there is certain destruction, but in waiting on God in this way, there is a peradventure the Lord may have mercy. The holy spirit has rendered the means of grace effectual to multitudes, and how knows each sinner, but of his rich grace, he may effectually reach him?

Hence also we may see that the ministers of the gospel not only may with safety and propriety, but are bound in duty to urge unregenerate sinners, as well as others, to a diligent use and improvement of the means of grace, and in that way seek unto God for regenerating grace. If the preceding view of the matter be kept up, such exhortations can have no tendency to settle people in a legal dependence on the means, nor promote security and carnal confidence. Yea, it is highly incumbent on the ministers of Christ to give particular directions to poor sinners, in order to their improvement of the means, in such a manner as has the most likely tendency, and wherewith it is most probable the holy spirit may concur, for their conversion to God. Certainly a mere external attendance upon the administration

tion of ordinances, while the heart is secure and careless, is not likely to answer any good end. Undoubtedly, such have need to be directed so to attend to the word of God as to compare themselves therewith, to examine themselves, and enter into a serious consideration of their own state and character, and lay to heart the danger they are in.

Awakened sinners are inclined to seek shelter in the duties of religion, and to expect healing and relief to their consciences from their earnest use of means. These need to be warned of that dangerous rock, and be directed to such a view of God's law as may more deeply convince them of their utter depravity, and slay them lead to the law. *Gal. ii. 19.* Their attention to the overtures of the gospel should be urged. Our safe path lies between two dangerous extremes, viz. Of those who only try to convince men of their unregenerate state, and leave all upon them to embrace Jesus Christ, and there leave under all their perplexing exercises and distresses, without any counsel or direction; and thus their various temptations, discouragements and despondencies are overlooked, and no assistance is administered when they most need it. It is a matter of great consequence, into what hands poor convinced sinners fall; an unskilful treatment of them is vastly injurious. The other extreme is those who direct sinners to duties and attendance on the means of grace in such a legal manner, as to encourage their dependance upon them. Such lead poor creatures to think they can do something to recommend them to God; their utter insufficiency in themselves is never fully opened up. On the contrary, they are told, if they

they do their part, God will do his ; and thus they are made to believe, there is a certain connection between their own best endeavours and the saving grace of God, that if they *do what they can*, God will do the rest. Thus the nature and design of the means is misrepresented. They are considered as means which sinners use with God, in order to prevail with him, rather than means whereby he deals with them, in order to call them back again to himself, and renders them irresistably efficacious for that purpose when he pleases. The first of these extremes tends to make sinners neglect all attempts to perform the duties of religion, or if they give their presence at ordinances, yet make no essay to strive with their own hearts, as being altogether in vain, without any tendency to promote their good, and not required of them in their present circumstances. While this doctrine is believed, Satan is not much afraid of damage to his interest from all their convictions of being in an unregenerate state ; for the consequence is, they quench the spirit. If convictions startle them, they, upon this principle, make no attempt to cherish their convictions, easily fall asleep again, and lie still in a careless indolence. By the latter extreme the striving of sinners is turned into a wrong channel, and they are directed to the use of means upon principles entirely wrong. The directions they get send them to the law for life, and settle them upon a righteousness of their own. Both the extremes are injurious to the interests of religion, and destructive to the souls of men ; both are to be avoided. The ministers of the gospel are to endeavour the conviction and awakening of sinners ; and where there are any awakenings, they are to attend to, and cherish them, and

and, by prudent, seasonable and evangelical counsel to direct their way, and point out the method of salvation to them. They have sufficient encouragement to such a conduct, upon this principle, that however dead, miserable and helpless sinners are, yet, it is by such views and impressions as evangelical councils and directions tend to, that the holy spirit carries on his work in the souls of men ; and therefore, when he concurs, they shall be rendered effectual. May the God of all grace teach his servants how to negotiate the treaty of peace and reconciliation, and make them abundantly wise to win souls to Jesus Christ. **AMEN.**

F I N I S.