

# A DISCOURSE

ON THE

NATURE AND DESIGN,

THE

BENEFITS AND PROPER SUBJECTS

OF

BAPTISM.

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PHILADELPHIA:

PUBLISHED BY B. B. HOPKINS AND CO. NO. 170, MARKET STREET.

FRY AND KAMMERER, PRINTERS.

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1808.

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For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.  
Acts ii. 39.

**THE** day of Pentecost finds the apostles and other disciples at Jerusalem, waiting for the promise of the Father. On the seventh sabbath after our passover was slain, the gospel of Jesus Christ was opened up more fully to his followers than hitherto it had been. The Holy Ghost was then given, receiving of the things of Christ, and showing them to the disciples. On this day, every doubt vanished, and their minds were perfectly freed from all uncertainty about the character and power of their dying and rising Master. In the midst of a vast assembly Peter stood up and preached Christ in such a manner, as made it evident that he had been extensively enlightened in the knowledge of the truth by the Spirit of the Lord. The scriptures concerning Christ were brought to his re-

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membrance, and he applied them with a power and evidence before unknown. When, in his admirable discourse, he had produced conviction in the hearts of many, so that they cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do,” he preached Christ for their consolation and salvation. And, as numbers of them were about to be introduced into the church by baptism, he took an opportunity at the same time to unfold the nature of that ordinance, and of the gospel itself. “Repent and be baptised every one of you for the remission of your sins, and ye shall receive the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children.” And because he saw some present who did not belong to the house of Israel, he adds, “and to those who are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” He taught them, that the promise before confirmed of God in Christ to Abraham, now belonged to them as his spiritual seed, and to their children, according to the constitution of the covenant of grace, and should belong to all others, though they were not of the circumcision, if, by receiving baptism, the sign and seal of the covenant under the christian dispensation, they should bring themselves within its reach. Peter, in this short discourse concerning baptism, touches on the nature of that ordinance, treats of the benefits it confers, and specifies the persons to whom it is offered. Let us therefore in the remainder of this discourse, follow the apostle’s track, and, from the scriptures, discover :

1. The nature and design of baptism.

2. The benefits that baptised persons derive from their new relation, both to the church and to God.

3. What are the requisites for baptism in adults, and in parents to hand it down to their children.

4. What sins exclude from this last privilege, after having once enjoyed, or been entitled to it.

Before we proceed to the examination of these points, I beg your attention to two or three observations, to prevent misunderstanding, and to prepare the way for a clearer elucidation. First; The church has passed through various dispensations, each of which has been attended with a sign prescribed by God, and given on his part, as a confirmation of his children's faith. The church in innocence had its peculiar sign, *the tree of life*. Reduced by the flood to Noah and his family, it received a new sign in the *rainbow*, which, while it secured the world from a returning flood, was also to remind its inhabitants, that the earth at some future period was to be cleansed by a Saviour's blood. When the church was gathered under Abraham, a sign was appointed also, to assure his hopes. And as the church was then to be separated visibly from the world, the sign which God gave him was characteristic and distinctive. When Abraham gave way to him who was both his predecessor and descendant, the sign was changed, and in its form of ministration, adapted to a dispensation in which there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither *male*

nor *female*. These various signs under succeeding dispensations were one in signification. being all tokens on the part of God, to confirm the faith of his church in his promises and grace.

But secondly; There were other signs different from these in their object and signification. Some appointed to be used by man, expressive of his obedience and gratitude; and others of a mixed nature, the same sign being a token both on the part of God and of man. The sabbath mentioned Exod. xxxi. 13. was a sign of the creation of the world, by the word and power of God. It was designed to be used by man for ever under all dispensations as a remembrancer of *God the Creator*, and of his sovereign right in his creatures. There was great propriety in changing the signs which the Creator gave on his part, when he saw fit to change the dispensations of his grace. But there was the same fitness, that the seal of man should remain one and the same; because that which man was called to seal by the observance of the sabbath, neither changed in its form nor nature. Again; there are other signs of a mixed nature, such as the *passover* and the *Lord's supper*. In these the same act was a sign on the part of God, and also of man. In the passover we observe, principally, God confirming his promise; but we also see distinctly man securing his preservation by the same sign or seal. The Lord's supper is another sign of a mixed nature, but principally given on the part of man. For although therein Christ testifies his love to his people, and signifies and seals himself "the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world;" yet it is prin-

cipally instituted as a token of remembrance to “shew forth the Lord’s death until he come.” Obs. 3. Some of the seals which God gave his church, were not only *confirmations* of blessings contained in the general offer of mercy, but they also contained *grants* of particular blessings, *conveyed* as well as confirmed by the seal. Thus, circumcision was, in some respects, simply a sign of confirmation, to increase the consolation of Abraham, and of his posterity. But it did also convey as well as secure some new and special blessings. It was to Abraham, with regard to the offers of grace and tender of eternal life, simply a sign of confirmation. It was the same thing with regard to the promises which concerned himself only; that he should have a son; that his seed should be as the stars of heaven for multitude; that in his seed should all the families of the earth be blessed; and that the land of Canaan should be the possession of his posterity. But in some other respects, and these very important, circumcision contained a *grant* of blessings as well as a confirmation of faith. When God promised to Abraham, that he would be the *God of his seed* as well as of himself; that, although he would punish his seed, he would never cast them finally away; and that his seed should be more highly favoured than the rest of the world, he not only confirmed but also granted the promise, in the same sign of circumcision. The certainty of this will appear, on reflecting that all these promises last mentioned were nullified where the sign of circumcision was not found. And this presents us with the true import of that expression, “This,” meaning circumcision, “is my covenant;”

the Lord God thereby signifying, that the promise was in the sign, and was conveyed as well as confirmed by it.

Having made these observations, I proceed,

1. To the first inquiry laid down in the order proposed for this discourse. What is the nature and design of baptism? Concerning the nature of this ordinance, there are two leading opinions. One opinion is, that it is a *covenant* strictly and properly made with God, in order to obtain certain blessings. The other opinion is, that, like prayer, it is a simple approach to God, to obtain whatever he has been pleased to promise in that way. The first seems more adapted to the state in which man was before he fell, in which he could with propriety become a party in a covenant, because he had a right to make, and power to keep a covenant. The latter opinion is more consonant to the christian dispensation, or covenant of grace generally, in which the *covenant of God* is but another name for *his free and merciful promise*. I observe therefore concerning the design of baptism, that its author, in appointing it, intended these two things: First, To confirm by a visible sign the faith of the receiver. Secondly, To convey by his seal certain specific blessings, engrafted by his abounding mercy, on the general covenant of grace. I shall have ample occasion hereafter, under the second general head, to take notice of the blessings conveyed by baptism, and shall therefore, under this head, only argue, that baptism *is a sign on the part of God*, given

to confirm the faith of man. I shall take it for granted, that as baptism holds the same place under the christian dispensation that circumcision did under the Jewish, an argument from the one will be conclusive in the case of the other. So that if it can be made appear, that circumcision was a seal of God's faithfulness, by which he meant to confirm the faith of man, the point will be yielded up concerning baptism. On this subject your attention is requested to the following considerations: That it was usual with God to confirm all his great promises with a sign; that Abraham on a certain occasion, asked of God such a confirmation of his faith; that the account we have of the institution of circumcision, leads us to suppose that it was given to Abraham to confirm his faith; and, lastly, that the language of the New Testament strengthens this opinion. The Creator has adapted his providential dealings to the constitution which he was pleased to give to man, and which is so much influenced by the impressions of sense. When Gideon desired a sign that God would certainly execute his covenant and give him the promised victory over Midian, the Lord met his wishes and gives him a sign in the fleece alternately wet and dry. In the sickness of Hezekiah, God was pleased to assure him by the prophet that he should recover, and to confirm his promise by a sign. To this end the shadow went back ten degrees upon the dial. We have already mentioned the tree of life and the bow in the clouds, those ancient signs and seals of the covenant and promise of the Lord. And this being commonly, perhaps universally, a part of the divine procedure, forms of itself

a very strong presumption, that God dealt in the same manner with Abraham, when he entered into covenant with him. This presumption is much increased by the consideration that Abraham, on a former occasion, humbly asked of God a sign to confirm his faith in the divine promise. "And the Lord said unto him, I am the Lord that brought thee out of the land of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, Lord God, how shall I know that I shall inherit it?" Gen. xv. 7, 8. This desire of the patriarch, to have a sign for confirmation, God was pleased to grant; and he gave him for a sign, *a burning lamp*, which passed between the parts of the sacrifice. In that day God meted out to Abraham his inheritance, and told him the burning lamp was a sign of his absolute determination to give it to him. The belief now grows strong that the sign of *circumcision* afterwards given was a seal of similar import. This belief will be much increased by noticing the account which the sacred historian has given us of the institution of circumcision. From this account it will appear, that it was given as a new confirmation of the promise of God, at that time not only renewed, but also enlarged. If it should appear, that when the signs of the burning lamp, and of circumcision respectively, were given, the Lord God was unfolding the same future scenes and making similar promises to the father of the faithful; then it would seem a most natural conclusion, that as the scenes were the same and the promises similar, the signs or seals given would mean the same thing. A very slight observation will convince us, that the communication

which God made to Abraham in the seventeenth chapter of Genesis was little else than a repetition of what he had revealed to him as we have it related in the fifteenth chapter of the same book. It is true, there were some things added, but the promises were in general the same. "Tell the stars, if thou be able to number them. So shall thy seed be." Gen. v. 5. "And thou shall be a father of many nations." Gen. xvii. 4. The promises being in general the same, is a sufficient argument, that the signs were of similar import. But because God adds to the promise originally made, another most precious promise, "I will be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee." Gen. xvii. 7; he was pleased, of this additional promise, to give to Abraham an additional sign. And the sign which was now substituted was not transient, like that of the burning lamp (which sign was transient because it was a sign of a blessing to an individual), but permanent, like the promise now added, which extended to all future generations. Lastly: The apostle, in his epistle to the Romans, instructs us, that circumcision was given as a sign to confirm the faith of Abraham. "And he *received* the sign of circumcision, a seal of the *righteousness of the faith* which he had yet being uncircumcised." Rom. iv. 11. "He received the sign." This expression conveys the idea, that at Abraham's request God appointed him, and he received circumcision a seal of God's faithfulness to his promise. But there is another expression in this passage, which not only goes far, but seems entirely to fix this as the meaning of the text. "He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the *righteousness of the*

*faith.*” Of what was this sign? It is not declared to be *the sign of faith*, but it is declared to be a seal of *the righteousness of faith*, or of *the value of that righteousness which is by faith*. Abraham believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness. If it was a seal and security of the acceptableness of such a righteousness, (and it certainly was a seal of this very thing) then it was impossible to be a seal on the part of man. It was a thing in which he could have no part nor agency. God imputed righteousness to his faith; promised that it should save him; and gave him circumcision as a sign, which sealed to him, not only all his other promises, but also that for himself and for his posterity, in all times to come, *the righteousness of faith* should avail to salvation. Circumcision therefore, and consequently baptism, is a sign and seal of God’s merciful promises, and is designed as a confirmation of his people’s faith. Nay farther, the sign is, by the sovereign appointment of God, so interwoven with the promise, that much of the promise fails where the sign is wanting. As in the passover the Israelite had the promise of security against the destroying angel, and yet must use the sign by which the promise was sealed: So when we receive the waters of baptism, we remember the gracious promises of God, and by receiving the seal we have the promises secured to ourselves and our offspring.

2. I now proceed to inquire into the benefits which are derived from baptism. These are of two classes. Such as arise from the relation of the baptised to

the church. And such as arise from their relation to God.

First: The benefits which baptised persons derive from their relation to the church. They become partakers of the *prayers*, and of the *care* of the church. Baptism introduces to the affections and prayers of the church. Men are by nature aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to its particular prayers. But being baptised into Christ, they begin to be partakers of divine blessings, in the prayers of the church. Nor should this be esteemed a trivial blessing. Prayer at baptism was used with such efficacy in the first ages of christianity, that it obtained the Holy Ghost. It is a very hopeful thing to be made the subject of united prayer. We may not indeed look for the miraculous descent of the Holy Ghost; but we do not cease to look for a blessing, while the assembled church of God stretcheth forth her hands, and taketh hold of the divine seal and promise. Who can calculate the value of a single application to the mercy of God, while believers stand around the baptised and pray for the blessings of eternal life? In this point of view, it appears improper that this ordinance should be administered elsewhere than in the house of God, or in places where his people are assembled. The prayers of those who are accustomed to take hold upon the promises of God are not obtained when it is performed in a private manner. Herein a double blessing is connected with baptism. In itself it contains the promise of God, and performed in the bosom of

the church, the fervent prayers of the righteous are obtained, to which a promise is engaged also.

Another benefit accruing to the baptised from their relation to the church, is that they become the subjects of its care and government. The seal of God separates us from the world, introduces us into the commonwealth of Israel, and entitles, as well as subjects, us to the care and admonitions of the church. This, at first view, may appear a benefit of little value. But if this care were exercised with faithfulness, and these admonitions given with patience and a becoming earnestness, it would soon appear a very important benefit. How wide the difference between a child going at large, almost in a state of nature, and that same child brought into a state of discipline and instruction! When the seal of God is put upon a child in baptism, immediately with regard to it, the good Shepherd commands the church, "Feed my lambs." "Take heed unto all the flock," is a precept which embraces all who have been introduced into the fold of Christ. The scriptures of the New Testament contain an account of a very short period in the church. Much explanatory information cannot therefore be expected on a point like this. Besides, the new dispensation being founded on the old, much is taken for granted as already known. But so far as appears from the Old Testament, all descriptions of circumcised persons were subjected to the same discipline, and were partakers of the same helps and counsels.

Thus far we have considered the relation which the baptised bear to the church, and the benefits of that relation. Let us, secondly, consider the relation they bear to God, and the benefits of that relation. By virtue of their baptism, they become a people taken out from the world and separated to God. We therefore find, that when the Lord directed Moses to go to Pharaoh to demand the release of Israel, he commissions him to say, that Israel was his peculiar people. "Israel is my son, even my first born. I say unto thee, let my son go." Exod. iv. 22, 23. It was the circumcision that conveyed and sealed to Abraham that promise, which made his seed a first born unto the Lord. And this accounts for the anger of the Lord against Moses, when he sought to kill him as he went from Midian to Egypt. The Lord was angry because Moses wickedly neglected his children, and left them out of the adoption of Israel. The *uncircumcised Philistine* belonged not to the separated people. As soon as any neglected or refused circumcision, they belonged not to the congregation of Israel. Not all the murmurings of the wilderness, nor all the rebellions of a forty years journey, could cast away Israel from the covenant relation which they held to God. But when there arose a generation, without circumcision, and therefore without the covenant of the Lord, they were in danger of soon coming into the reproachful state of Egypt. They had now approached so near to the uncovenanted state of Egypt, that it became necessary to circumcise the people before they could enter into the land of promise. When the circumcision was finished at Gilgal, "The Lord said

unto Joshua, 'This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you.' Josh. v. 9. And to the same purpose our Saviour saith concerning baptism, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part in me." Thou belongest not to the people, whom by the seal of my church I select and make my peculiar people in this world. Circumcision was the livery of the Jewish church, and when it was put on the gentile world, they ceased to be strangers and foreigners, they ceased to be without God and without hope. It is the same with baptism now in the christian church. But it would be to no purpose that a people should be separated from the world unless there were benefits arising from that separation. These benefits are many, and are briefly but comprehensively summed up by the apostle in the two following passages. "What advantage then hath the Jew, or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way; chiefly, because unto them were committed the oracles of God." Rom. iii. 1, 2. "Who are Israelites, and to whom pertaineth the *adoption*, and the *glory*, and the *covenants*, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises." Rom. ix. 4. The first of these passages assures us, in general, that the benefits arising from separation to God are great and numerous. The second designates the particular blessings. Let us notice the principal of these in the order in which the apostle has placed them: The adoption, the glory, the covenants, and the promises.

1. Baptism secures to those who receive it, *the adoption*. In this are comprehended two blessings; the particular compassion of God; and the liberty of

access to him under all distress of soul and body. It procures the adoption, and with it the special compassion of God. This proceeds naturally from so near a relation. They who are embraced by it, become the sons of God, and he condescends to assume the relation of their Father. He dealt with the Jews, so as he never did with any other people. Hence we hear the prophet saying in the name of the Lord, "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him I do earnestly remember him still, therefore are my bowels troubled for him: I will surely have mercy on him, saith the Lord." Jer. xxxi. 20. The same superior love continues for Jerusalem, when for its iniquities it was ready to be destroyed utterly. "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, and ye would not." Mat. xxiii. 37. Such was the peculiar love with which God loved his adopted people. But further: Baptism, by procuring the adoption, procures along with it, access to God under every trial and difficulty. Circumcision was the seal of adoption to the Jewish people, and the declaration "whose is the adoption" was made by the apostle, not only while the nation was in its most holy state, nor even in its most degenerate condition, though still a nation; but it was made, and it should be remarked, when the nation was broken up; when its civil polity was destroyed, and when every part of its national worship was laid prostrate. They had the seal of God upon them; and, in consequence thereof the adoption still was theirs.

The adoption belonged to every Jew, and each had a right to many valuable privileges of the sons of God. And certainly it is one of the first and most natural of these privileges, to have a right, with hope and comfort, to come unto the Father. And it is fully evident, that all Jews, those excepted who were cut off from the congregation, had access to God. To them was the promise given, "Call upon me, in the day of trouble, and I will answer you." A father gives access into his presence, not only to his best beloved and most affectionate children, but to all his children. Not indeed with equal complacency; but with equal willingness to help their infirmities, and with equal disposition to correct their errors. Israel, having received the token of adoption, in their circumcision, might come with boldness to the throne of grace to obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. Because the nation partook of the adoption, all its members enjoyed the privilege of coming yearly to the temple and calling upon God as their God and Father. For this same reason, Judas having received the token of the adoption under the new dispensation, was admitted into the presence and conversation of his Lord, and this privilege continued, until by his sinful conduct he threw himself again out of the covenant. This aims a deadly blow at the scheme of those who affirm, that there is no encouragement to pray or perform any duty, except by those who are *savingly* interested in Christ. The whole world, in some very important respects, is considered as being in Christ, and may therefore approach to God through him: but they especially who are made partakers of the adoption.

2. A second blessing, mentioned by the apostle as belonging to that people whom God separated to himself, is contained in the words "whose is the glory:" they enjoyed *the glory of his presence*. He led them through the wilderness, by the pillar of cloud and of fire. His glory appeared on Mount Sinai, at the door of the tabernacle and on the mercy seat. And did not God continue to manifest himself to his peculiar people in a miraculous and glorious manner? This same glory attended the seal which under the new dispensation of the covenant succeeded circumcision. What excellent glory usually attended the separation by Christ of a peculiar people to himself in the first ages of the church! In the administration of baptism the Holy Ghost descended visibly and powerfully on the baptised. And although these miraculous glories have ceased, yet God hath not ceased to own and greatly to bless this *setting to* of his seal. As he hath promised and sealed in baptism, he still affords the operations of the Holy Ghost, according to the measure of faith by which the promise is apprehended in the seal. For I think it may not be doubted, that God gives the glory of his presence more steadily and more sensibly to those who have been baptised, than to others. It is to no purpose to say, that such are usually placed in circumstances more favourable than others to receive divine impressions. This, instead of invalidating, confirms the fact, and only shews that God usually fulfils his promise in the use of means.

3. Another blessing belonging to baptism (inasmuch as that ordinance separates a people to God) is contained in the words of the apostle, “whose are the covenants.” The Jews had very precious covenants sealed to them by circumcision. They were embraced in a covenant in which “faith was imputed to them for righteousness.” The apostle informs us, as we have already seen, that circumcision was the sign and seal of this. This was one of the covenants. And to sinners, it was, and is, a most inestimable blessing. But there was another; for the apostle makes mention of covenants: And that was the merciful covenant, by which one generation had the privilege and power of bringing the rising one under the spreading banners of the covenant of grace, and of the promises. This was, and yet remains, a truly precious covenant, through which we take the seal of the living God, and put it on our children, and households. So that by the constitution of the covenant of grace, and the extended influence of the promise, whosoever holds the seal, may bring his children near to God.

4. The last blessing now to be mentioned, connected with baptism, is, that it conveys the promises of God, “whose are the promises.” Among these stand most conspicuous the promises: that those, who, being baptised, die in infancy, should be saved; and that the *possession of the seal* should impart to the possessor the power of conveying both the seal and its benefits to the rising generation. God commanded the seal of his promise to be put on the bodies of infant children, and at the earliest possible period:

saying, "I will be a God to thy seed." To convey and secure this promise to Abraham, God ordered the seal of his covenant to be put upon the bodies of the infant seed of the father of the faithful. "He gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision, and so Abraham begat Isaac and circumcised him on the eighth day." Acts vii. 3. What are we to suppose is meant by the promise, "I will be a God to thy seed." Are we to think that it meant nothing more, than that in general God would take care of Abraham's children, as he had already watched over and blessed *him*? or are we to believe, that this promise was of such a nature that it conveyed some valuable blessing to every individual who became a subject of it? It appears to be the fair construction, that when God promised, saying, I will be a God to thy seed, he did engage himself to every individual who should receive the seal of the promise: And is there any way in which he can manifest himself to be the God of those, who by the counsels of his infinite wisdom are allotted to die in infancy, but by taking them to himself in glory? To take them from their cradle to his heavenly life, is all that he can do for them as their God. I mean not here to decide unfavourably on the case of those who die in infancy without being baptised. But I do mean to exalt the grace of God, and the efficacy of his sealed promise: And that this is the meaning, at least in part, of the promise, "I will be a God to thy seed," is much confirmed by the consideration, that as God suffered the seed of man to perish, by his despising the threatening of God, so he hath, in restoring the ruins of that fall, secured the salvation of

the dying infant, by connecting it with the promise made to the parent. “These are the little babes, says Doctor Watts, who just enter into the world to die out of it, and who are saved from everlasting death, merely by the spreading veil of the covenant of grace, drawn over them by the hand of a parent’s faith.”

A last promise, resting upon and secured by baptism, as formerly by circumcision, is, that the *possession of the seal* should impart to the possessor the power of conveying both the seal and its benefits to the rising generation. “I will be merciful to thousands of generations of them that love me.” The fulfilment of this promise, and indeed its very existence, is connected with the affixing of the seal. And the seal affixed secures the succession of the promise. If circumcision failed, they in whom it failed interrupted the descent of this promise. But where faith enough remains to esteem and hand down the seal of God, this promise remains and is handed down also. On this the Jewish people have been supported as a peculiar people, and are to the present day supported. It is in vain that they are peeled and bruised. It is to no purpose that they are crushed and oppressed; they are preserved a distinct people, and as was prophesied, “they dwell alone.” And the cause is obvious: “Thus saith the Lord, I will be merciful to thousands of generations.” The covenant made with Abraham, and afterwards renewed with David, extended downward through many generations. And while the Jews continue to retain the seal of this extensive promise, they cannot be destroyed. If they were to become an un-

circumcised people, they would soon melt away, even under far better circumstances. But in virtue of this seal, they are still held up, and by virtue of it they shall be at length recovered to Christ: "For God is able to graft them in again." This consideration alone, appears sufficient to destroy the opinion of those, who cut off from baptism the children of those who are not partakers of the Lord's supper: And especially on the ground "that they who kept not the passover, were cut off from the congregation of the Jews." Where are the Jewish passovers now? Where were they during the captivity? Nay; where were they during some long reigns of wicked kings? Yet the people ceased not to receive the seal of the living God, nor did he cease to be their God. But while he chastened them he did earnestly remember them still. That the Jews are yet retained in covenant with God, is undeniable from the account which is given of this matter. Lev. xxvi. 44. "And yet for all that, saith the Lord, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them, for I am the Lord their God."

3. We proceed now to inquire, what are the requisites for baptism? And what are the requisites in parents, to hand it down to their children? It will be seen that there are here two points to be discussed. The requisites for baptism in adults: And the requisites in parents to receive that ordinance for their children. In our investigation of the requisites for baptism, for persons in adult age, it will be necessary to inquire; whether there is not a certain difference

to be observed, between those who return alone from idolatry, and those who come in (as servants and children matured in age) with others who believe and have been baptised: and also between those who return from heathenism, and those who are descendants from persons already in covenant with God. *Faith* in the Lord Jesus Christ is the grand requisite for baptism, and for partaking of the promises connected with that ordinance. But whether *a faith was required which apprehended Christ in a saving manner*; and whether it was required equally, in order to baptism, in those who had been bred up in idolatry, and in those who were descendants of Christian parents, is not so certain. That saving faith does embrace Christ, and his benefits, is not to be doubted. But whether God, who beholds the world in Jesus Christ, at least in some important respects, and can therefore dispense his compassion on any terms, and to any extent that seemeth good to him, does require absolute and saving faith, before he makes and seals any promise; this is much more than doubtful. It does not appear certain that *saving faith* was required by the first Christians in order to the receiving proselytes from among the Jews or heathens. It is true that there are some strong expressions used in conversations between the apostles and those who were about to be baptised. “If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest,” said Philip to the eunuch when he desired to be baptised. This may not however have meant any thing more, than strongly to test his sincerity. And agreeably to this the eunuch answered and declared his faith, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” In which answer there is a strong asseveration

of his sincere belief that Jesus Christ was a divine person, but no absolute declaration that he had, or believed that he had, saving faith. He believed that Christ was exalted as a prince and a Saviour, to grant repentance and remission of sins:" but any thing further than this does not appear. The practice of the apostles and evangelists is the best comment on their doctrines on this subject. Immediately, forthwith, the same night, or day in which sinners were convinced of their sinful and dangerous state, they were baptized into Christ. Now this practice is by no means consistent with the doctrine, that the ordinance of baptism belongs only to saving faith. There was no time allowed to ascertain that point. Oftentimes there was scarcely opportunity even to have a short conversation on the subject. The force of this observation may perhaps be evaded by bringing into view the inspiration of the apostles, by which they had without inquiry some knowledge of the heart. It is certain however from fact, that the apostles did not at all times possess the power to discern the hearts of those whom they baptized. Because great numbers gave distressing evidence after baptism, that their hearts were not converted to God. Or if they did by inspiration possess at all times the power to discern the heart, then the conclusion is certain, that saving faith was not a requisite for baptism. When therefore we see the apostles, who were at least occasionally possessed of the power to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart, notwithstanding, admitting those to baptism, who were not converted: And when we see them sometimes administering baptism to thou-

sands, the same day they were pricked to the heart, and therefore, from the impossibility of the case, not holding even a short conversation with each one to inquire after the evidences of their conversion; and when at other times individuals were baptised *the very same hour* in which they became the subjects of conviction of sin, when time might have been allowed for examination and trial: there can hardly remain a doubt but that baptism was administered to such faith as “pricked men in the heart, and made them cry out, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” It might be asked, whether our Lord’s admitting Judas into the number of his disciples does not throw some light on this subject? If true and saving faith had been required in order to being brought nigh as a peculiar people, would Christ who knew the heart, have permitted Judas to be initiated into the glory and covenants, and promises? But whether this will be yielded to us or not, it must be allowed and confessed, that servants and grown children, of persons in covenant with God, were by the divine command sealed with the seal of God, even though they did not possess that faith which saves. When Abraham circumcised his household, can it be supposed that all the grown persons in it, were partakers of the saving grace of God? The number of persons born in his own house, now grown to the years of maturity, and who were circumcised, was no less than three hundred and eighteen. In addition to these, those were also circumcised, who had been bought with his money. Gen. xvii. Have we any experience at this time; or have we any observation of that period of

the world, to justify a belief, that all those were, or even thought they were, subjects of the saving grace of God? But what seems to put the matter beyond dispute is the transaction that took place immediately before the Israelites entered the land of promise. A whole generation, more than six hundred thousand, were circumcised together. Is it to be supposed that all these were partakers of the regeneration? Do their lives and their rebellions, as they stand on record, persuade us that the Spirit of God did dwell in them? Yet they were all circumcised. And what we wish to be particularly remarked: All these could not have been brought into covenant with God, as the children of parents possessed of saving faith. Because, among so great a multitude as these, we must suppose many destitute of parents; and very many other parents who were not in covenant, in any other way, than by the possession of the seal of the covenant. The parents of this generation were almost universally dead already. It seems probable that God at this time, by pouring out his Spirit, and by the sight of the land of promise, did give to many a saving faith, and to all a belief of his promises, and a desire to be partakers of them. And this was their warrant to receive the conveyance and seal of those promises. Being the immediate descendants of a people in covenant with God; they were *a holy generation*. Just as the apostle declares the children to be, of those who were under the seal of God. “The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife; and the unbelieving wife, is sanctified by the husband; else were your children unclean, *but now are they holy.*” 1. Cor. vii. 14.

From which quotation, and from what has been mentioned of Abraham's family and of the nation of the Israelites, it is certain, that there is a great difference in the eye of God's covenant, between those who are brought up in a state of heathenism, and those who are the children of believing parents. And it is reasonable that this difference should constitute a proper ground of difference in admitting the one or the other, to the seal of the Lord. The first, were total strangers to the commonwealth of Israel; the last, were born a holy seed, and were brought up in the bosom of the church, but had grown up to the years of maturity, without having received the seal of God. With these last, it was requisite only to possess a faith, which embraced the being of God, and received the scriptures, containing the offers of mercy and grace, in Jesus Christ as his word. Possessed of this, they were entitled to come into covenant with him. And a faith which *understands the character of Christ and desires an interest in him*, entitles sinners now to receive *baptism*, the seal of that gracious declaration that *God is reconciling the world unto himself*.

The requisites in parents for presenting their children to receive baptism remains yet to be considered. When we speak here of requisites, we wish to be understood to speak of, and inquire into, the ground of right, which parents possess according to the divine covenants, to bring their children to be baptised. There will probably be found three opinions on this subject. The first opinion will require a public profession of religion, and participation of the Lord's supper, to entitle the parent, to present his children to receive baptism. The second will be satisfied with true piety

in the heart, though not publicly professed. The third opinion will rest the infant's baptism on the baptism of the parent, and on the right and power thence derived, of handing it down to his children. The first of these opinions, which requires a public profession of religion, expressed by partaking of the Lord's supper, is certainly not supported by the scripture. A line of separation drawn here, has the appearance of being correctly drawn, because it is so easily discernible. And it seems to many to be fixed and established here, from the consideration, that they who under the Jewish dispensation "kept not the passover, were cut off from the congregation." But plausible and captivating as these things may appear, they are only like many other plausible things which so suddenly have captivated, and were afterward as suddenly set aside. Because the Jews, who did not keep the passover, were to be cut off from the congregation, therefore it is presumed, that the privilege of circumcising children was dependent on keeping the passover. Or in other words that none could have their children circumcised till they had eaten of the passover. This argument, from the parity of the case, is applied to the partaking of the Lord's supper, and baptising the infants of christians. An appeal, and a very short one too, to Moses, and to the apostles of our Lord, will soon rectify this mistake. The direction given by Moses, on this point, is so very plain, that one would think there could not possibly be a mistake about it. The direction to which we refer, is laid down in the book of Exodus xii. 48. "And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the

Lord, *let all his males be circumcised*, and then let him come near and keep it." It appears from this passage, that they who deny baptism to the infants of such as are not partakers of the Lord's supper, while they mistake the meaning of one passage of Moses, do most flatly deny another. According to their scheme, the inquiry should have been about the right of circumcising children, and the parent should have been debarred this privilege, until he had eaten the passover. And while Moses thus directs, we find the apostles of Jesus Christ, acting precisely according to this rule. When the jailor was convinced of sin, by the Holy Ghost, and desired the things which pertain to salvation, he was baptized. And was he after this informed that when he should have eaten of the passover, it would then be proper to baptize his household? The apostle pursued a course directly the opposite of this. The jailor and his household were baptized, and then the way was prepared for the Lord's supper. When Lydia's heart was opened by the Lord, so that she was baptized, the apostles, without waiting for her to receive the Lord's supper, baptized her household. Considering the command of Moses, and the practice of the apostles, we are bold to say that there is not a shadow of authority, for the opinion of those who make a partaking of the Lord's supper a requisite for parents to receive baptism for their children. Neither does that opinion which demands true piety in the heart, as absolutely requisite in parents to receive baptism for their children, appear to be founded on the scriptures. We have already seen, that according to the divine covenant, the children of be-

lievers are born a *holy* or peculiar seed. We should therefore suppose them from their birth entitled to certain privileges. But when, in addition to this, they have by baptism been owned as belonging to the Lord, there can be little doubt but that they are allowed to hand down the seal of God to their children ; which leads us to notice the third opinion on this subject: That the right and power of handing down baptism to our children, is derived from the baptism of the parent. There were many sins which made the circumcision of the Jew to become uncircumcision. And there are many sins, the commission of which, make the baptized man become a heathen man and a publican. We do not therefore, mean to say that under all circumstances, the baptism of the parent will give him the right of baptism for his children. But we mean to say, that the right in parents to have their children baptised, arises from their own baptism, and that this power can only be interrupted by the commission of sins. The sins which limit or take away this privilege from baptized parents, shall be considered under the next general head. God acts his sovereign pleasure in his covenants and promises, and not only in his covenants and promises, but in the method also of conveying those covenants and promises from generation to generation. “ The promise is unto you and to your children.” The conveyance of this promise is connected not so much with the faith that is acted by the parent, (though the degree of efficacy may be connected with that faith,) as with the seal which God has set to his covenant, and which, where-soever it is put, conveys by its virtue from parent to

child. This will appear evident from the position, that although a man were possessed of saving faith, nevertheless, if he were not possessed also of the seal of God's covenant, he would have no power to bring, in a covenant way, his children near to God. In other words, if he were not baptized, he could not, his faith and piety notwithstanding, obtain baptism for his children. But wherever the seal is, there, from the nature of the covenant, and as a part of it, is found also the power and inestimable privilege of communicating the adoption to the infant seed. And this power continues, till through *unbelief*, the seal of God is omitted, and then the communication is broken off. This brings us, in the fourth place, to inquire: What sins should exclude baptized parents from obtaining baptism for their children? To decide this point precisely, may not be a very easy thing. But, without despairing to cast some light upon the subject, I shall attempt it from the best helps of scripture and reason built thereon. We may venture to observe in general, that from so great a blessing, given by the Lord in so much mercy, we cannot suppose that God would direct that any should be prevented on slight grounds. I think we may settle it down in our minds, that in order to interrupt the succession of baptism, the seal of God's promises, there must exist sins of such a nature in the applicant, as to indicate a want of belief in Jesus Christ, discovered in gross ignorance or contempt of his character, or habitual disregard of his authority. Cutting off from baptism is the infliction of the greatest possible punishment by the church. It is the capital punishment, which entirely cuts off that spiritual

life which flows through the covenants of God. We cannot suppose therefore, that any sin should become a sin of excision, unless it were of a nature to constitute treason against the Divine Majesty. When Adam fell, it was by a sin which aimed directly at the Divine Being and perfections. He believed the devil rather than God. He disbelieved God. From the same principle, in well regulated governments, capital punishments are connected with crimes which are aimed at the existence of the state. Agreeably to this idea, we find, that the sins, which in the Old Testament are mentioned as sins of excision, or cutting off, are such as express a disregard of God, or a disregard of his perfections; and those of the New Testament, such as express a disbelief of Jesus Christ, or of the necessity and value of his atonement. In the Old Testament there are various sins recorded as excluding from the blessings of Israel. The breach of the sabbath was reckoned among these sins, *Exod. xxxi. 14.* The sabbath was given from the beginning, and enjoined, especially on the Israelites, as a sign that God was the creator of the world. The profanation of the sabbath was therefore a denial of the Creator. Sins of a presumptuous nature, and obstinately persisted in, did cut off from the congregation. They were evidence of a full casting off of God. The neglect of circumcision did most particularly cut off from the blessings of Israel. This neglect was, in those who were guilty of it, a wilful and persevering declaration, that they desired not the knowledge of God or the benefit of his promises. Precisely of the same nature with the abovementioned is the cutting off for

nonobservance of the passover. It went to a denial and disbelief of God, who brought Israel out of Egypt. In the New Testament, which is so much occupied with the doctrine of salvation, and covers so short a period of the church's discipline, we do not find much upon this subject. Yet in this short period, we find for our direction, that the "incestuous person," was cut off from the covenants and promises; and being cut off, was, in the nature of the thing, delivered over to the rule and fellowship of the prince of darkness. Such enormous conduct was an absolute contempt of him, who had said, that the fornicator should not inherit the kingdom of God. They too, who preached a gospel in which Jesus Christ was not the chief corner stone, were declared worthy to be cut off. From a full view, therefore, and comparison of the Old Testament with the New, we may venture to state, that it required under the Old, in order to be cut off from the promises and their succession, sins, which in their nature contradicted the knowledge and belief of God; and under the New, a total ignorance or prevailing disregard of Jesus Christ as Saviour. If it be asked, How can we decide what sins argue a total or prevailing disregard of Jesus Christ? It is answered, that the Old Testament and the New afford a sufficient guide, if discretion and prayer be combined with their aid. The blasphemer was to be cut off under the Old Testament. Let him be a stranger to the covenant of promise under the New, who is a blasphemer of the name of God and Christ. He was cut off under the Old Testament who kept not the sabbath; the sign of the creation of the world. Let him under the New Testament

be cut off from handing down to his seed the promises of God, who disregards the sign of the new creation, by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Let the fornicator be cut off. Let him that holds not the faith of Christ, but teaches another gospel than that which makes Christ the corner stone, be cut off. Finally, let him who has been often reprov'd for his sins and hardeneth his neck be cut off, and that without remedy, except the remedy of repentance.

It has been often said, by those who reject all children from baptism, except those of partakers of the Lord's Supper, that there must be a line drawn somewhere: And they ask, Can it be drawn any where so distinctly as around the Lord's table. We answer, that a line drawn around the Lord's table, can indeed be distinctly seen, if it were correctly drawn: but we deny, that either the word of God, or the nature of the ordinance, points out this as the proper place to draw the line. And we affirm, that we do not see any great difficulty in discerning from the scriptures the place where this line should be drawn. It should be drawn around the children of those who, being baptized themselves, are instructed by the Holy Ghost to acknowledge their own baptism, and to desire to introduce their offspring to the blessings of the covenant of grace. Nor should the immediate adult descendants of baptized persons be rejected on the profession of their faith in the blood of Christ, and their desire to become partakers of his purchase. It may be asked, by way of objection, Why are any rejected on this plan? If it is the seal of God to his own covenant, why should it not be presented to the heathen, and even to

atheists? To this it is answered, that in rejecting the unbelieving and grossly ignorant, we follow the example of God, and the precept of our Saviour. We follow the divine example. For although the Lord offers his grace and mercy universally; though he works in all and promises his Holy Spirit to produce repentance; yet, when men arrive at a certain pitch of infidelity and sin he withdraws. Of some he pronounces: "Why should ye be smitten any more? ye will revolt more and more." Is. i. 5. We follow also the precept of our Saviour, who though he published salvation to all, yet forbade his disciples "to cast pearls before swine." Even the offers of grace were not to be presented. Notwithstanding therefore the universal offer of mercy, we are not only *warranted* but *bound* not to prostitute the ordinances of Christ, by administering them to the impious and unbelieving.

We shall now conclude this discourse by three short observations: 1. The account of baptism, given in the preceding discourse, takes away entirely all objection from infant baptism. While this ordinance is considered in any other light than as the seal by which God bestows mercy and confirms it, there is some difficulty in discovering where its great benefit to infants lies. If we consider baptism as a covenant, properly entered into by the parents with God, then the difficulty arises, concerning the power of the parent to bind the child; or, in the strict meaning of the word, devote him unto God. When infant baptism is considered as connected solely with saving faith in the parent, then the plausible, though not solid objection, arises: How can the infant believe? The truth is, that

these questions and objections, and the opinion from whence they arise, are founded in error, and want of knowing the scripture, and the power of God in Christ to make his promises to whom, and in what manner it shall seem good to him. When the nature of baptism is learned from the scripture, and it is seen to be the seal of God, it appears at once no less necessary and proper to administer it to children than to adults. Children come into the world poor and miserable, wretched, blind and naked; and they stand in need of the mercy of God to meet them, and his covenant to embrace them, as soon as they come into the world. This covenant is presented and sealed by baptism, the seal of the Lord, and can therefore be applied to infants with no less propriety than to adults. Just as a rich and bountiful man would meet the infant of a poor man and present him with an inheritance; so the Lord Jesus suffers little children to come to him, and forbids them not; but presents his seal to them, and makes them partakers of the inheritance of “the adoption, and glory, and covenants, and promises.”

2. This account of the nature of baptism shows its value, and especially to infants. If baptism is no more than a token on the part of man of his acceptance of the covenant, then there seems to be no remarkable benefit resulting from it. It is true indeed, that on this plan baptism binds, by a public declaration; for men feel something on account of consistency of character. But even this benefit is lost, in a great measure, on those who are baptized in infancy. From the tenderness of their years, they have no remembrance of the engagement. On this ground therefore, the benefit is

small. But, when according to the scripture we connect the virtue of the ordinance, not with any thing in them that receive, nor in him that administers the ordinance, but with the promise only which it both conveys and seals, it assumes a great value. In one case, if a person were asked, why do you baptize your children? He would answer, I feel it to be important to enter into covenant with God on their behalf, and bind them with my vow. In the other case, the same question would be answered, I desire thereby to embrace that gracious constitution of God, by which parents are permitted to bring their children within the pale of his promises. I delight to take the seal of God, and impress it on my child, by which the covenants, and the glory, and the promises may be his. When adults or children are presented before God, to receive baptism, they come just as they do in prayer, not to merit, but to accept what God has promised. Prayer is a solemn approach to God to receive his promised blessings. Baptism is an approach to God still more solemn, for greater blessings and larger promises; nay more, that God would be pleased to set to his seal, and make his promises sure. Herein baptism appears precious, yea inestimable. It appears just what we might expect it to be, from the solemnity with which it was instituted. What shall we say then of that cruel indifference which induces parents to neglect this ordinance, and thus leave their children out of covenant with God. They are guilty of the very sin for which God was angry with Moses, and for which he sought to kill him, as he was going from Midian to Egypt.

3. We learn, that the practice which denies baptism

to any infants, except of those who have saving faith, and are partakers of the Lord's supper, is not built on scriptural ground. This will appear in several particulars, which I shall state with much brevity, because most of them have been touched already. The practice alluded to, rests on a covenant of works. Its connexion with a legal covenant is covered and disguised. But it is still connected with the covenant which gives reward to merit, and which offers mercy, not to poverty and wretchedness, but to inherent righteousness. It limits the affixing of the seal of the covenant, and confines it within improper bounds. Baptism, being the seal of the covenant of grace, on the part of God, should be applied with no other limitation, than that which God, by various directions, has been pleased to prescribe to the covenant offer. It is contrary to the scripture in precept and in practice. The seal of God under the ancient dispensation of grace, was given to the inhabitants of Sychem generally. It was applied to the whole household of Abraham, the grown persons of which were very numerous. It was applied to the whole Jewish people at once, more than six hundred thousand, all of whom we cannot suppose were united savingly to Christ. It is still applied to the Jews, and holds them fast in covenant with God. It was placed on the bodies of children, before their parents were permitted to eat the passover. The stranger, who desired to eat the passover, received express command to circumcise all the males of his house, before he could celebrate that solemnity, *Exod. xii. 48*. Conformably to this last mentioned direction, the apostle Paul baptized the families of the jailor and Lydia, be-

fore any mention was made of the Lord's supper, and without any reference to it. These considerations are sufficient not only to confirm our minds against the charges of laxness and half way practice, but to direct and constrain our course, and fill us with fear and dread, if we should undertake to restrict the grace of God within undue limits.

To the God of peace and good will to men, who hath said concerning his own seal, "this is my covenant:" be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

FINIS.