

PRESBYTERIAN MAGAZINE.

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Communications.

SHEPPARD'S SINCERE CONVERT,

ABRIDGED BY E. S. ELY.

(Continued from page 170.)

CHAPTER III.

All mankind is now fallen into a most woful estate of sin and misery.

The devil abused the serpent, by making him the means of temptation; and man abusing his own faculties, especially his will, brought himself and all his posterity in him, into an estate of sinfulness and misery. Let us consider, 1st, man's misery in regard to *sin itself*; and 2dly, in regard to *the consequences of sin*.

I.—1. Every man living is born guilty of Adam's sin. Now the equity of God in laying this sin to the charge of every man, though none of Adam's posterity personally committed it, may appear from the consideration, that God in wisdom and goodness constituted Adam the *representative* of his race, under the covenant of works; so that had he stood in righteousness, all mankind had stood with him. It is but equitable, therefore, if we should have been partakers of his gains, that we should be also partakers of his loss; and that he, falling, we should fall in him. This dispensation was calculated to promote the safety and quiet of mankind; for had he stood as our covenant head, all fear of losing our happy estate had been prevented;

whereas if every man had been left to stand or fall for himself, as he should appear in the world, each man would ever have been liable to fall, and in fear of falling. Adam was as likely to stand in righteousness for himself and his posterity, as any one would have been for himself; and more so, if he knew that he had charge of the estates of all the millions which should be born. He was the head of mankind, and they the members of that head; so that if the head practise treason, the whole body is found guilty, and must suffer. If these things satisfy not, there is a day coming, in which God will reveal his own righteous proceedings before men and angels.

Oh! that men would consider the nature of original sin, and be humbled by it. Next to the sin against the Holy Spirit, and contempt of the gospel, this is the greatest sin which cries to heaven for vengeance: for now men's sins are committed against God in their base and low estate; but this sin was committed against Jehovah, when man was at the top of his preferment. He was a traitor in the court, among the favourites, and not a rebel on the dunghill. This sin darkened the very sun, defaced the image of God, the glory of God in man, and became the prolific parent of all the swarms of sins, which have since infested the world. It comprehended in itself a fearful *apostacy* from God, like that of the devil; a horrible *rebellion* against God, in which man took sides with revolted an-

sacrifice." Psal. l. 5. All others will be driven away in their wickedness. But, perhaps, you will say, the diversity of the several branches of the church is so great, that you know not which to join; and so you remain separate from all. Now, this is the very plea, which will condemn you before God. Has he permitted so much variety in his church? Is the door left so wide? and can you not find the way into the church universal? It is evidently, because you desire an excuse. You are not willing to serve God any where. You do not love any of his people, of any denomination. Therefore your pretended excuse, will be the ground of your final sentence, and hopeless misery. "Live without Christ, an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, a stranger from the covenants of promise, and without God in the world," a few days longer, and the door of mercy will be shut; and you must live without God for ever.

Dear young people: You are the "lambs of the flock." How afflictive to the shepherd, to see the lion and the bear, tearing away his lambs! Such is the sorrow of the shepherd, whom God has set to watch and feed his spiritual flock. He sees you leaving the fold, the church, and going astray, into the world. Can you find better company than that of the saints, who are styled the excellent of earth? Are satan, and his servants, better company than Christ and his people. Beware what you do, O young people; for "when once the master of the house has risen up, and hath shut to the door," you are undone for ever.

Come then, follow the faith of Moses, and of the whole church of God. Determine to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Then you will be joined in one spirit and hope of your calling, with all the Israel of God. And with them, in due season you will be made perfect.

BRIEF THOUGHTS ON BAPTISM.

That WATER BAPTISM was practised at the commencement of the Christian dispensation in conformity to divine appointment, cannot be denied. "I baptize with water," said John, the forerunner of our Lord, to the Jews, John i. 26; and that his baptism was from *heaven* is certain from the commission under which he was acting, as well as from the question proposed by our Saviour to the chief priests and elders of the people concerning its origin. Mat. xxi. 25. Jesus Christ himself was baptized by John; and afterwards, in the course of his ministry, administered the same heavenly rite. "Rabbi," said some to John, "he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou bearest witness, behold the same baptizeth; and all men come to him." John iii. 26.

Having risen from the dead, the Redeemer gave to his apostles a commission to *baptize* as well as to preach the gospel. Mat. xxviii. 19. In execution of their commission they administered this sacred rite to all their converts. On the memorable day of Pentecost, three thousand were added to the church by baptism; for it is expressly stated in Acts ii. 41, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized." Philip preached the gospel to the people of Samaria, and baptized those who professed to believe, "both men and women." Chap. viii. 12. Among the number that received this Christian ordinance at his hand was Simon Magus, who had made a profession of faith in Christ, but was afterwards discovered by Peter to be "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." Chap. viii. 13, 23. Paul was baptized by Ananias, who had been sent for that purpose by the Lord Jesus. Chap. ix. 18. Peter baptized Cornelius and his friends, to whom the Holy Spirit had been given. Chap. x. 48. Lydia and her household were baptized by Paul.

Chap. xvi. 15. The jailer and his family were baptized by Paul and Silas. Chap. xvi. 33. "Many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized," by the great apostle. Chap. xviii. 8. At Ephesus too he baptized certain disciples. Chap. xix. 5. The Roman Christians were baptized. Rom. vi. 3, 4. That the Corinthians were baptized is manifest from a passage already cited, and is still further evident from what Paul says in his first epistle to them. Chap. i. 13, 16, 17.

From these texts it appears, that both Peter and Paul, apostles of Jesus Christ, were in the constant practice of baptizing their converts. That the baptism which they administered was *water baptism* is unquestionable. "Can any man," said Peter in reference to the centurion and his friends, "forbid *water*, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" Paul undoubtedly spoke of *water baptism*, and not of the baptism of the Spirit, when he said, "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." The practice of the other apostles, it is certain accorded with the practice of these two illustrious men, who stood pre-eminent among their associates: for they all acted under the same commission from Jesus Christ to evangelize and baptize the nations. The epistle to the Corinthians was written, it is computed by some, about the 60th year of the Christian æra, and that to the Romans in the 61st; and from the dates of these epistles we learn, that the administration of *water baptism* was certainly continued in the church by *apostolic* men, nearly *twenty* years after the ascension of our blessed Lord into heaven.

From this long continued practice of the apostles, it is manifest that they understood their commission as requiring the administration of *water baptism*; and it ought to be considered as being decisive of the question relating to the perpetuity

of this ordinance. But if the uniform practice of apostolic men be not sufficient to settle it, a doubt should not remain, when we consider the words in which the commission is stated. The commission extends to *all* nations, not only those which existed in the first ages of Christianity, but nations then unborn, and nations that shall still rise into existence in future ages of the world; for if this be not the meaning of the commission, there is no authority given by the Head of the church to ministers of the present day to preach his gospel. That this is the true meaning of it, and that it was intended to comprehend the ministry in every age, is manifest from the promise connected with it, which runs parallel with time: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." The commission must be co-extensive with the promise given, to encourage the apostles and their successors in discharging the duties enjoined by it; and as the promise reaches to the end of the world, so must the commission. But the commission prescribes the administration of *water baptism*; consequently this Christian ordinance must be continued in the church to the end of the world.

Yet baptism has been called a *carnal* ordinance, a mere *Jewish* rite! How mistaken are they who use this unwarrantable language! The apostles for a time tolerated the observance of the Mosaic ritual by their converts from among the Jewish people. But so far from requiring Gentile Christians to submit to circumcision and other positive institutions of Moses, they, in a solemn assembly, convened for deliberating on the subject, pronounced it as their judgment that they were under no obligation to observe them. Acts xv. 4, 5, 22—29. Yet these founders of the Christian church did command Gentile, as well as Jewish, believers to be baptized; and uniformly, in the whole

course of their ministry, administered this Christian ordinance to their converts. And shall baptism be called a mere Jewish rite? that ordinance which was instituted by Jesus Christ, just before he ascended into heaven? that ordinance which he commanded his apostles and their successors to administer, in a commission that will not expire till the conflagration of this world?

But, it is insisted, that baptism by water has been abolished. When? we demand, and by whose authority? It is certain that no authority inferior to that of Jesus Christ, by whom it was instituted, was competent to set it aside. Now, if he has abolished his own ordinance, let the passage of sacred scripture be produced that certifies the fact. A record of its institution has been made in the statute book of his kingdom; and if it has been annulled, an annunciation of his supreme will must have been given, and a record of it must be found in the same book. Produce the passage, and we submit to his authority. Shall we be referred to the declaration of Paul? "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." And can any imagine the apostle really meant, that he had received no commission from Christ to administer baptism? If this were his meaning, why did he administer it at all? That he did baptize, and even some of the Corinthians, is certain from the context of that very passage; for he says expressly, "Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanus; besides, I know not whether I baptized any other." 1 Cor. i. 13—16. Those who urge this text as implying that, in Paul's opinion, baptism was a rite unworthy of regard, find no difficulty in explaining very different-

ly another text in which a similar phrase is used. "Labour not for the meat that perisheth," says our Lord, "but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life." John vi. 27. Now, they never interpret this command, so as to believe that Christ absolutely forbids them to labour for their daily bread. They well know that he enjoins nothing more than that a preference should be given to heavenly objects, and that we should seek them with supreme desire. How is it then that they imagine Paul meant to assert absolutely that he had no commission from Christ to baptize, when he tells us in this very chapter that he had baptized several of the Corinthians? Surely he would not have administered baptism to any, if it had been abolished, or if the observance of it had not been enjoined on the church, or if he had not been commissioned to apply it to suitable subjects. In our apprehension there is no difficulty in understanding the apostle. We believe he only meant to exalt the preaching of the gospel in importance above a positive institution; and to inform the Corinthians that he regarded the publication of the glad tidings of salvation as his chief business, in comparison with which the administration of baptism was in his view a matter of inferior consideration. He therefore seems to have left the latter duty to others, that he might have more time for attending to the former. Yet he did not wholly neglect the other, but as circumstances required applied baptismal water with his own hands to some of his converts.

It will be said, perhaps, that baptism was designed only to answer a temporary purpose, and to continue in use only till the coming of our Lord. If the Saviour's second coming to judge the world be meant, we cordially acquiesce in the remark; for then we believe this and all other institutions that pertain to the Christian dispensation will be

abolished, and a new and nobler form of worship, suited to the eternal state, and the light and glory of heaven, will be established. But if any other coming of our Lord be intended we dissent from the remark as unfounded. Let any other be selected, and it can be proved that baptism was not annulled by the event. Did Christ come when he sent down the promise of the Father, and poured out his Spirit on his little church? Baptism was practised by the apostles long after that memorable day. Did our Lord come, when he destroyed both the civil and ecclesiastical state of the Jewish people; when, by the destruction of their temple, he put it out of their power to observe the ceremonies appointed by Moses? What influence could that tremendous judgment have on Christian baptism? This ordinance constituted no part of the Jewish religion; and therefore it remained uninjured when the whole fabric of Mosaic institutions and worship was overthrown.

Still, however, it is asserted, that the present dispensation is *too spiritual* to admit of the perpetuity of water baptism. That it is far more simple and spiritual than the Jewish economy, and that it is freed from that burdensome ritual which was formerly prescribed to the church, is thankfully recognised. But it certainly is not more spiritual, than the great author of it was pleased to make it; nor has it been so refined as to be suited only to disembodied spirits. Man, while he remains in the body, requires some form in which he may do homage to his Creator with the inferior part of his nature. Accordingly we find, that although we are required to worship God in *spirit*, it is made our duty to assemble together, that we may bow before the Lord in the great congregation and sing his praises. Spiritual as is the present dispensation, it is not incompatible with the perpetual use of water baptism. We have proved

that it was instituted by Christ, and that for nearly twenty years after the commencement of this dispensation it was certainly practised by the apostles; and it has been shown that no passage annulling the ordinance can be produced from the sacred scriptures; and that the application of it is enjoined on the ministry in a commission reaching to the end of time. Had this ordinance been of so carnal a nature as some allege, and so inconsistent with the spirituality of the Christian dispensation, it would not have been instituted at the commencement of it; much less would it have been permitted to continue during that period, when the Holy Spirit was shed down on the church in the largest measure, and when the disciples of our Lord enjoyed his richest gifts, and felt the power of his grace in the highest degree.

It has been rashly asserted, that if a person have received the baptism of the Spirit, he needs not the baptism of water. The apostle Peter did not think so; for when "the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word," and his Jewish companions "were astonished" at the event, he immediately inferred the right of Cornelius and his friends to baptism; and said, "Can any man forbid *water*, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Acts x. 47, 48. The fact is there is no inconsistency between this Christian rite and the spirituality of the present dispensation. Had there been an incompatibility between them, baptism would not have been appointed by our Lord, nor would his holy apostles have administered it to primitive Christians. The first disciples of our Lord, men filled with the Holy Ghost, received this ordinance; and surely if they submitted to it, regarding it at once as a duty and a privilege, who are we, degenerate successors in the hea-

venly race, that we should deem it too carnal to comport with our claims to spirituality in the service of God? Was it a confirmation to *their* faith, a help to *them* in their journey to heaven? And shall *we* slight it as unworthy of our acceptance, and deserving of no more regard than an antiquated rite of Moses? It is not to be ranked among those indifferent matters concerning which Paul says, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." Rom. xiv. 5. It is a prescribed duty, which should be acknowledged and practised by every professing Christian. J. J. J.

(To be continued.)

INDIAN AFFAIRS.

The President of the United States is now pursuing a system of measures, in relation to the Indian tribes within our borders, which deserves the approbation, and entitles him to the thanks of every true Christian. Without giving a preference to any religious denomination, he appropriates the funds put at his disposal for this purpose, among the different missionary establishments, for the support of the Indian children who attend the schools attached to these institutions. Through our government, many hundreds of these little ones of the forest are now learning to read, write, keep accounts, and practise the most useful arts. They are forming the habits of civilized man, and will be prepared eventually for citizenship.

With the spirit which animates our present chief magistrate, the superintendent of Indian trade, colonel Thomas L. M'Kenney, is evidently influenced, in affording every facility of communication between the missionaries and their friends, and the Indians, which is in his power. He is an agent well suited to promote the benevolent designs of the executive; while at the same

time his zeal honours and gratifies the generous sentiments of his own mind. We tender the President and colonel M'Kinney our hearty thanks, and in so doing are confident that we express the gratitude, not only of the different Presbyterian churches, with their 1500 ministers in the United States, but of all the Christian congregations in our land.

We have heard but one dissentient voice, indeed, from any quarter, and that has just sounded forth from *Red Jacket*, one of the Seneca chiefs in the state of New York. We strongly suspect, however, that *Red Jacket* has been prompted by some enemy of Christianity, and that some insidious infidel indited his *Letter*, while he professed to act only as an amanuensis; or else, that the chief designed to please his Governor, by following his fashion of attacking the administration of the federal government. At any rate the letter was transmitted to the legislature of New York by governor Clinton, and thus has come before the world; when he might have kept it on the files of state for his own private information and guidance.

After complaining of the depredations of the white people on the timber belonging to the Senecas, of the frequent thefts of their horses and cattle, of the imprisonment of the Indians for debt, and of the injury done to their hunting and fisheries, *Red Jacket* proceeds to say,

"Our great father, the President, has recommended to our young men to be industrious, to plough, and to sow. This we have done, and are thankful for the advice, and for the means he has afforded us of carrying it into effect. We are happier in consequence of it. But another thing recommended to us, has created great confusion among us, and is making us a quarrelsome and divided people; and that is the introduction of preachers into our nation. These Black Coats contrive to get the consent of some of the Indians, to preach among us; and whenever this is the case, confusion and disorder are sure to follow: and the en-

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But it may be asked, of what use is baptism? An inquiry that may be prompted by two very different states of mind. If it proceed from a temper determined to regard the ordinance as destitute of authority, unless its use be perceived and acknowledged, it deserves severe animadversion. Does it become creatures to dispute the propriety of appointments made by their Creator? Is it for us, who are but of yesterday, to question the wisdom of any institution ordained by the great Jehovah? Should it not be deemed sufficient to satisfy our minds that an appointment is both wise and useful, to be informed that it is his appointment? Neither its wisdom nor its utility can be affected by the dulness of our perception. These properties are independent of our apprehensions; they remain precisely the same whether we perceive them or not; just as light is light, whether the human eye see it or not. Humility becomes us; and it should always be sufficient to silence every objection, to know that the Lord hath commanded or appointed a thing.

But the question may proceed from a very different state of mind; from a disposition to understand the purpose for which this positive

institution has been appointed by the Great Head of the church, and a desire to derive the benefit for the conveyance of which it was designed to be the vehicle. In this case, it merits respectful notice. In reply to this inquiry we shall just hint at two purposes for which baptism was instituted.

One is, to afford to adults a favourable opportunity for making a solemn and public dedication of themselves to the service and glory of God. All who sincerely and properly receive this sacred rite, will have previously made this act of devotion in private. But this by no means renders a public repetition of it unnecessary. It is well known in the experience of exercised Christians, how much it contributes to their stability in religion, frequently and daily to renew their covenant engagements with God: And if benefit result from this act when done in secret, may we not anticipate more from the performance of it in public, attended by circumstances calculated to deepen on the mind the remembrance of the interesting transaction, and to strengthen the ties by which we bind ourselves to our God?

Nor is the advantage arising from such a solemn act of public devotion confined to the recipient of the ordinance. It may do good to spectators. For when baptized Christians witness the dedication of another to the service of God, they are reminded of the sacred engage-

ments that have been imposed upon them by the same religious rite; and when others who live in disregard of their duty, behold one renouncing the world, the flesh, and the devil, and publicly vowing to lead a new and holy life, and to spend the remainder of his days in glorifying his Creator, must they not be at once solemnly admonished of their criminal conduct, and sweetly allured to obedience, by an example so worthy of imitation? Few scenes can be more interesting and impressive, than the public baptism of pious adults. Many an individual has been indebted to such exhibitions of duty for convictions, that have ultimately issued in a sound and saving conversion.

Besides, baptism was instituted to be a sign and seal of God's covenant with his church. A record of this covenant we find in the seventeenth chapter of the book of Genesis. They are greatly mistaken who imagine that this covenant was a part of the Mosaic appointment, and that it expired with the former economy. Against such a conclusion, an inspired apostle has guarded us. From Rom. iv. 11—17, it appears, that by this covenant Abraham was constituted the head and father of all believers, whether circumcised or not, whether Jews or Gentiles; their father, not merely as an illustrious pattern of faith and obedience, but as a *covenant-head*, to transmit the blessing of this covenant to all his spiritual seed. Hence in proving his assertion, the apostle cites a part of this very covenant; "As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations." verse 17.

On the perpetuity of this memorable covenant, the apostle expressly reasons in Gal. iii. 15—29; and shows, that, as the giving of the Mosaic law could not annul it, so its permanence in the church could not be affected by the abolition of that law; concluding his argument with this inference, "And if ye be

Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." What promise? Doubtless the promise of this perpetual covenant.

Now, of this covenant, circumcision was, at its institution, appointed to be the *token*, that is, the *sign* and *seal*. This office it continued to perform until it was superseded by the introduction of baptism, the Christian token, or sign and seal, of God's gracious covenant. That circumcision has been abolished, admits of no doubt. It will therefore follow that, if baptism has not been substituted in its place, the covenant has no seal. Were this admitted to be the fact, it would present a strange anomaly in the history of the divine economy toward the church: for all other covenants which God condescended to make with men were confirmed by a seal; the covenant of works by the tree of life, the covenant of Noah by the rainbow, and the covenant of Horeb by the blood of sacrifices. And is it reasonable to suppose that this covenant, made with the church, after having been confirmed for ages by a visible seal, should, having its seal torn away, be left to operate without such a help to the faith of God's people? It is incredible. We bless our covenant Jehovah it is not the fact. He has been graciously mindful of the infirmity of our faith, and provided for our support a new seal; a seal better adapted to the milder dispensation under which he has placed his church. Baptism is now the appointed seal, substituted in the room of the ancient seal which accorded with the rigour and severity of the former economy. So we are taught by an inspired writer. "In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in the putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him, through the faith of the operation of God, who hath

raised him from the dead." Col. ii. 11, 12.

Baptism, then, is a seal of the covenant which God has made with his church. It serves the important purpose of confirming all its gracious promises. Let none say that the simple word of God is sufficient, and that such a confirmation is unnecessary. Thus to speak would be to reflect on his infinite wisdom. He knows the nature of man, and he knows too how suspicious guilt has made him; and although his simple word carries along with it ample security that he will do what he promises, yet he himself has deemed it becoming his own infinite majesty, to give to his people the additional security annexed to a visible seal: nay, he has judged it proper, and no way derogatory to his truth and glory, in consideration of the weakness of our faith, to interpose the solemnity of an *oath*, in order to establish, in the view of "the heirs of promise." "the immutability of his counsel. Heb. vi. 17, 18. These additional securities are presented, not to bind Jehovah to the fulfilment of his promise, as if without these obligations there were danger of his acting contrary to his engagements, but entirely on our account, to inspire us with a lively faith, and dispel from our minds every doubt in regard to divine faithfulness.

Baptism then is designed for the confirmation of our faith in the promises of God's covenant. Whoever receives it is assured by this visible sign that Jehovah will do what he has engaged to do; that he will cleanse the believing soul from all the guilt of sin by the blood of Christ, and from all its defilements by the grace of his Holy Spirit; and that he will be his God in the highest sense of the promise for ever and ever.

Nor is the faith of the recipient alone thus strengthened by this ordinance. It serves, as often as administered, to confirm the faith of the church. The Lord condescends, on

all such occasions, to invite his people to contemplate the provision he has graciously been pleased to make for establishing their confidence in the stability of his covenant. He assures them that as baptismal water is applied to the person of the candidate, so certainly will he accomplish all that he has promised to do for them; and that as an honest man cannot depart from a covenant engagement signed and sealed, much less is it possible for the God of truth to break his covenant, which he has sealed for the very purpose of convincing us of its immutable faithfulness.

How grateful should we feel to our heavenly Benefactor for an ordinance designed to answer such invaluable purposes! Let us admire his condescension to the infirmity of our faith. Instead of regarding it as a mere ceremony, let us revere it as an institution appointed by the King eternal, and sanctified by his grace to the benefit and consolation of his church. J. J. J.

BRIEF DISCOURSES—NO. III.

BY E. S. ELY.

On Keeping Secrets.

"Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself, and discover not a secret to another; lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away." —Prov. xxv. 9, 10.

Solomon was an adept in the knowledge of human nature. After a long and candid examination of the views, feelings and conduct of men, he was so fully convinced that most men were tattlers, as to write a proverb, recommending profound silence upon every subject which you would not willingly make public. "Discover not a secret to another." If you have any matter which you would conceal from *any* one, conceal it from *every* one. If you would not *openly* proclaim your situation, conduct, and feelings, *be silent. Reveal nothing; no, not*

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We have contemplated some of the uses of baptism when administered to adults. Let us now inquire into the uses of this ordinance when applied to infants. Here, as in many other things, men run into opposite extremes. Some magnify the benefit of this Christian rite beyond what inspired writers warrant us to expect; while others, equally mistaken in their views of duty, reject it as unscriptural and useless. The former affirm baptism to be regeneration; believing that all infants, washed in the name of the adorable Three, are delivered from the corruption of their nature, and endued with a new principle of spiritual life. To this opinion we cannot assent. We reprobate it as unfounded and dangerous. That the Almighty can regenerate an infant by his grace, is not to be doubted; and from the admission of this fact, it will follow that, if he please, he may communicate spiritual life at the moment in which a child receives the outward sign of this great and necessary blessing. But from the power of God to do a thing, we cannot infer his *determination* to do it. His omnipotence, which, by a word, brought this world into existence, is able to create, in the same way, ten thousand other worlds this moment; but no one is so extravagant as to found on this fact an ex-

pectation of seeing, in this, or in the next hour, such stupendous exhibitions of Almighty power. The power of Jehovah to regenerate a child in the act of being baptized, supplies no ground of expectation that he will do so: nor could we infer even from occasional occurrences of such a connexion between the rite and the thing signified, any thing like a uniform procedure of a sovereign God, in dispensing renewing grace in conjunction with his own appointed ordinance.

If we look at the conduct of baptized children, we shall find no evidence to support this extravagant opinion. Alas! too generally they discover unequivocal signs of a depraved nature, and of being under its full and unbroken dominion. They need, as well as unbaptized children, to be regenerated. If baptism be regeneration, then, for the same reason, circumcision must have been regeneration; and consequently none of the seed of Abraham, who had received this initiatory rite of the church, would have needed the quickening process of renewing grace, how much soever they may have needed repentance and reformation. But our blessed Lord affirmed the necessity of being *born again*, in the most comprehensive terms; and he doubtless had respect to Nicodemus, with whom he was conversing, and all other circumcised Jews who had not been born again, as well as to Heathen men who were destitute of the seal of God's covenant. Simon Magus

was baptized; yet he gave such indubitable evidences of being destitute of spiritual life, that the apostle Peter pronounced him to be "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." Acts, viii. 23.

Others run into the opposite extreme. They deny the obligation of infant baptism, and reject it as a useless and unscriptural ceremony. They demand from us a warrant to justify our practice. In the cursory view we are taking of this subject, a formal discussion of this point cannot be expected. A few hints only will comport with our design.

Let it be observed then, that infants were *members* of the Jewish church, and by divine appointment wore the *seal* of a covenant relation to Israel's God; that the identical covenant sealed by circumcision, has come down to the Christian church, with all its promises and privileges; that not one word can be adduced from the inspired records, to show that infants have been disfranchised of their chartered privileges enjoyed through a long succession of ages, and expelled as aliens from the house of God in which it was their happiness to dwell; and that under the present dispensation, the privileges of all the members of the church have been, not diminished, but augmented. Infants then of Christian parents we cannot but regard as sustaining a covenant relation to God, and as entitled to membership in his church. We, therefore, think ourselves justified in demanding in our turn, a warrant for depriving infants of a privilege secured to them by covenant. We ask, when, and by what authority, was this covenant abolished, or altered in any essential feature? We appeal to the writings of Paul, as furnishing incontestible proof of its *perpetuity*; and of the fact, that, as Christians were contemplated in its original institution as the spiritual seed of Abraham, so have they a right to claim for themselves and children

a share in its ample blessings.—Now, we have seen in a former paper, that baptism has succeeded to the place of circumcision as the sign and seal of God's covenant; and consequently it follows, that the application of this rite pertains to all who have an interest in the covenant; and therefore that infants are now to be *baptized*, as they were formerly *circumcised*.

The simple fact that baptism is applied to children by divine appointment, ought to be sufficient to satisfy our minds, whether we can see the advantages of it or not, that it must be beneficial, and cannot be an useless ceremony. The appointments of infinite wisdom and goodness will ever be found profitable to those who observe them in the prescribed way.

But we are not left to this naked exercise of faith. It is easy to discover various ways in which infant baptism conduces to our edification. That *sealed union* to the church, which baptized children enjoy, is not to be regarded as an inconsiderable benefit. "Salvation," said our Lord, "is of the Jews;" and it is equally true that salvation is of the Christian church. The blessings of salvation, its light, and grace, and life, are transmitted, from age to age, in the line of God's people's seed. At times Jehovah may step beyond their habitations, to bless those who are aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise, and bring them into his church: but uniformly the blessings of salvation are bestowed on the covenant seed; and the children rise up to succeed their parents in maintaining the worship of God in the world. Let us not be misunderstood. We do not assert that grace descends from father to son, like a worldly inheritance; for it is now true, as it always was, "They are not all Israel that are of Israel;—that is, they which are the children of the *flesh*, these are not the children of God:

but the children of the *promise* are counted for the seed." Rom. ix. 6. 8. But we affirm, that although thousands of baptized individuals may never receive saving grace, and die in unbelief; yet, as Jehovah always had among the Jews an election of grace, even in the most degenerate times, who adhered to his worship, so he has, in every age of the Christian world, selected subjects of his renewing grace from among the descendants of his professing people. The history of the church is replete with proofs of this fact. And no wonder; for it is but the fulfilment of the covenant promise, by which Jehovah has condescended to engage to be a God to his people and to *their seed* after them. Gen. xvii. 7.

Doubtless it is a great privilege to belong to that society on which the Almighty looks with such benignant smiles; a society from which he selects the subjects of his grace and the heirs of his heavenly kingdom. Baptized members of it have, it must be admitted, a fairer prospect of being called by the Spirit of God to fellowship with him in his saving love, than those who are not members. They are in that *nursery* from which the Lord takes the trees of righteousness, and plants them in his garden, that they may flourish beneath his special care and cultivation.

Nor should it be deemed an unimportant advantage that the promises of the covenant are presented to baptized children in a *sealed* form. The gospel may be freely and indiscriminately preached; the heralds of the cross may sound through the world the delightful assurance, "He that believeth shall be saved:" but while the baptized participate in all the encouragement to be derived from this general promise, they may contemplate this and all other promises of the covenant as confirmed by a seal, and presented to them in this inviting form. They may behold

the Supreme Being, stooping to their weakness, and condescending to encourage their faith, by increasing the assurance of his infallible word by his own appointed sign; and hear him speaking to them in this cheering language: "Sinner, I know the unbelief of thy heart. My naked word ought to inspire thee with unhesitating confidence; and I might justly leave to the destructive consequences of their unbelief, all who will not rely upon my promise: but, in compassion to the infirmity of thy fallen nature, I graciously add my token to my word; and, by this visible sign, I assure thee, that I will fulfil all my promises. As certainly as thou hast been washed with the water of baptism, so certainly will I bestow on thee all the blessings of my covenant, if thou accept of them by faith in Jesus Christ, my well beloved Son."

Baptism most certainly imposes an obligation on all to whom it is applied. The inability of infant children to understand the nature and design of this ordinance, and to consent to receive it, cannot annul the obligation. They are the creatures of God; and he has a perfect right to require his people to devote their offspring to him. And is it not the duty of their children, the moment they become capable of moral agency, to consent to be the Lord's? Are they at liberty to choose whether they will serve him or not? Are they not bound by imperious obligations to devote themselves to the service and glory of that Almighty Being, from whom they have received their existence and faculties? What is baptism but a recognition of this truth? What do parents in presenting their offspring in this sacred ordinance, but acknowledge that they belong to God; and therefore dedicate them to his service, engaging to endeavour to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? The recollection then of this solemn

transaction, when they were presented to their Maker in baptism, and consecrated to his glory by their parents, is certainly calculated to awaken in them a sense of their duty to God, and to restrain them from a course of sin. It lays too a foundation for frequent addresses to them from the pulpit. Ministers may claim baptized youth as the peculiar property of God, on which he has been pleased to set his seal; and plead with them, as they would not forfeit those great privileges to which they have been introduced as members of the church, not to continue living in a way that will bring down upon them so heavy a loss; but to secure to themselves all the blessings of that gracious covenant into which they have been admitted.

That parents who present their children in baptism, are brought under very serious obligations, will not be questioned; for they expressly engaged to perform the duty of parents to their offspring by instructing them in the knowledge of divine things, by praying with them, and setting before them a Christian example. Now, it is true that antecedently to the reception of this ordinance, they are under imperious obligations to take care of the spiritual welfare of their children; but it cannot be reasonably doubted, that the solemn recognition of these obligations, and solemn engagements to perform them, must have a very salutary influence in keeping a sense of them alive upon the mind, and of stimulating them to do their duty. Here, then, is another advantage of infant baptism; an advantage in which both parents and children participate: to the one, as it serves to incite them to discharge a duty they might otherwise neglect, or to rouse them to a more careful performance of it; to the other, because they are benefited in proportion as their parents attend to the interests of their immortal souls.

Parents ought to make a due use of infant baptism. They should inform their children, as soon as they are capable of understanding it, of the interesting transaction that took place in the house of God; how, in the presence of a whole assembly of worshipping Christians, they were solemnly dedicated to God. They should endeavour to impress their minds with a deep sense of the obligations imposed on them by that transaction, and urge them to renew the engagements then made by a personal surrender of themselves to God. Let them also plead the baptism of their children in prayer, as an argument to enforce their petitions. Let them humbly remind the Lord that they have given their children to him, and earnestly pray that he would in mercy make them his in an everlasting covenant. Let them beseech him to fulfil his great promise to his church in their experience, by giving them new hearts and new spirits. "They are thine, O God, by baptism, make them thine by grace. They are sealed by thine appointed ordinance, O seal them by thy Spirit."

Baptized children are placed under the guardian care and parental watch of the church. The church is bound to provide for them that instruction which is needful to them; to inspect their morals; to admonish them when they go astray; to bear them on her heart before the throne of grace, and implore for them all the blessings of salvation; and to furnish them with inviting examples of Christian piety. It is indeed the duty of the church to endeavour to diffuse abroad among the nations the light of the blessed gospel; but while she looks with a compassionate eye on the desolate places of the earth, she is bound especially to strive to promote the interests of her own members, and bring them to behold the light of the truth, and to rejoice in the salvation of Christ.

The frequent administration of

baptism manifests the kindness and wisdom of God, in providing for the edification of his church. We need repeatedly to be reminded of our duty; and God, who knows our frail nature, has so arranged the order of his house, as to meet our wants. Whenever a child is dedicated in baptism, all parents who witness it are reminded of their engagements, and all baptized children of the duty which they owe to that Supreme Being, to whom they were devoted in their infancy. This provision is made for keeping alive a sense of the obligations imposed by this invaluable ordinance.

In conclusion let it be observed, that baptism is a source of grateful recollections to every pious mind. "How tender," may the Christian say, "were the mercies of God! I was not born of Heathen parents, and dedicated to some idol; but of Christian parents, who felt their obligations to consecrate me to the service of the one only living and true God. In my infancy he was graciously pleased to take me into his covenant, and make me a member of his church. He favoured me with the instructions both of my parents and of his ministers; and now, although I wandered from him, and requited his kindness with base ingratitude, he has been pleased to enrich me with his saving grace. I acknowledge the infinite debt of gratitude. I give myself to his service. I am his, and I rejoice to be his for ever and ever."

J. J. J.

FOR THE PRESBYTERIAN MAGAZINE.

BRIEF DISCOURSES—NO. IV.

On all Things working together for Good to them that love God.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God." ROMANS, viii. 28.

Were we to form our judgments of the characters of our fellow creatures invariably from the fortunate or unfortunate events which befall

them, it must at once appear obvious that such judgments would, very frequently, prove exceedingly false and uncandid. In the progress of human life, the race is not always to the swift nor the battle to the strong. The gifts of Heaven appear to be bestowed without the least distinction. The fool and the wise man often seem to meet with the same success.

But in the midst of this seeming confusion, an unerring and superintending Providence presides.—There is a secret plan, which the wisdom and skill of mortals cannot unfold, hastening forward to completion. The humble worshipper, whose pious accents no human ear ever heard, and whose benevolent actions none but those to whom they were performed ever witnessed, passes not unregarded by his heavenly Father. While the ungodly seem to prosper, and, in the midst of their impiety, appear to enjoy more than the righteous believer, there may be some secret operation going forward that may terminate ultimately in their eternal ruin. We are expressly informed in the text, that those who love God are exposed to no such danger. They dwell amidst the munition of rocks, and the Eternal is their defence. To them prosperity and adversity, in one sense, are equally indifferent—these may promote, but they cannot retard, their future good: for all things shall co-operate for good to them that love God. To illustrate the truth of this proposition shall be the object of this discourse.

But before immediately entering on the illustration, there are two things which shortly claim our attention. *These are the OBJECTS concerning whom the declaration is given, and that GOOD, to accomplish which all things are said to co-operate.*

To love God is the requisition of the first commandment of the moral law. It is the incumbent duty of