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SERMON LXXVI.

BY JOHN MATTHEWS, D. D.

Professor in the Theological Seminary at South Hanover, Indiana.

THE MORAL STATE AND CHARACTER OF INFANTS.

LUKE 18:15, 16. *And they brought unto him also infants, that he would touch them: but when his disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them unto him and said, Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.*

THE holy Scriptures are given to make us wise unto salvation; to teach us "what we should believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man." They are wisely adapted to this great and important purpose. But here they stop; to this object they are limited. They contain nothing to satisfy an idle curiosity. When Peter would know what *this man shall do*, he receives a mild rebuke instead of the information which he desired. This information could not have made his path of duty plainer, nor the labors of his life more useful. When others inquired respecting the number that should be saved, they are earnestly exhorted to secure their own salvation, by entering in at the strait gate. Had this knowledge been given, they could not be saved without holiness. Many inquiries now made, had they been presented to the Savior, would have been dismissed in the same way. If our inquiries are prompted by an honest desire to know our duty that we may perform it, we will find, from the prayerful study of the Bible and the providence of God, full and satisfactory information. But if our inquiries proceed from mere curiosity; if the information required has no connection with our duty or the improvement of our moral character; we must apply to some other source than the Bible for such information. It would be useless to give us information respecting those objects which are, in their own nature, incomprehensible to our minds. If the language employed was suited to the nature of these objects, we could not understand it; and if it was accommodated to our limited faculties, it could not explain the nature of these objects. As far as our agency extends, we have information to guide the useful efforts of this agency: but where our agency ceases, there our information also ceases. The husbandman has a sufficient knowledge of the surface of the earth to direct his labor to useful results; but he knows nothing of the surface of the planets, because his agency does not extend to them. If our information is full and complete, our whole energy is to be exerted; if our information is limited, but a limited agency is required; if we have no knowledge, we can exert no agency.

This is especially the case respecting the moral state and character of infants. It were easy to ask a number of questions respecting them to which the Bible furnishes no answer; and yet we have information amply sufficient to guide us in discharging our duty towards them. This is the subject—the moral state and character of infants—on which we would offer a few remarks. These remarks will relate exclusively to that period of life which precedes moral agency. We undertake not to fix on this period; nor is it necessary to our purpose.

I. Our first remark is, that infants are included in the mediation of Christ. The children brought to Christ, as stated in the text, were literally *infants*. Matthew calls them *little children*; Mark, *young children*. We may, with propriety, call an infant a little, or a young child; but we cannot, with the same propriety, call all children infants. At what age the term infant ceases to a child is not determined. It is certain, however, that custom confines the use of it within a few months, or years at most, of the earliest period of life. The same word translated in the text *infants*, is found in five other passages: In Luke 1:41,44, on which we offer no remarks. In Luke 2:12, 16, it is applied to the Savior, the same night after his birth—ye shall find the babe—they found the babe, &c. Acts 7:19—so that they cast out their young children, &c. The cruel edict of the king did not suffer the children to live beyond the period of infancy. Even the parents of Moses did not attempt to conceal him longer than three months. 2 Tim. 3:15—and that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures. This may mean either, that before the close of infancy, some knowledge of the Scriptures was obtained; or, that from the close of that period, this knowledge commenced. 1 Pet. 2:2—as *new born babes*, &c. There can be no doubt of the meaning of this passage. The children brought to the Savior, then, were literally infants; they had not reached the period of moral agency.

The declaration of the Savior is positive: *of such*, that is, of such infants as these, *is the kingdom of God*. This phrase means either that state of happiness enjoyed by good men after death; or, that dispensation of mercy revealed in the gospel. If understood in this first sense, if infants enjoy the happiness of heaven, then unquestionably they are included in the mediation of Christ. If they should enter heaven in some other way than through his mediation, they will not sustain the same relation to him which others do; one source of joy is cut off from them, which is free, and full, and overflowing to others. In one song they cannot join, which others sing with heavenly devotion. If the phrase means the dispensation of mercy, and if infants are included in this dispensation, it is equally clear that they are included in the mediation of Christ; for it is only through Christ that mercy is exercised. If you exclude them from the mediation of Christ, you exclude them from the mercy of God, or find some other channel through which this mercy can flow. Without deciding what is possible or impossible with God, we may, with confidence, affirm, that the Scriptures reveal to us no other channel of mercy than that of Christ. Taking the Scriptures for our guide, if we exclude infants from the mediation of Christ, we exclude them from the mercy of God. Although we do not suppose that parental affections are the standard of truth, and still less the rule according to which the great Jehovah decides on the measures of his government, yet as these affections are innocent, useful, and required, they cannot be inconsistent with these measures. When parents are called to follow a beloved infant to the grave, the conviction that this infant was no more within the reach of mercy than the fallen angels, would pierce their heart with anguish keener than a two-edged sword.

Pious parents have been, and still are, required to dedicate their infants to God. This was the design of circumcision, to distinguish those who were, by

public profession, the people of God, from those who were not. This rite implied the enjoyment of privileges, and the bestowment of blessings, which could only be enjoyed and bestowed through Christ. This rite was, by the positive command of God, to be applied to infants. As certainly, therefore, as infants were circumcised, so certainly are they included in the mediation of Christ, through whom alone all spiritual blessings are conferred. The Jews were also required to dedicate their firstborn males, while yet infants, to the Lord. As this offering was according to the will of God, of course, it was acceptable to him. It was a religious dedication, and necessarily implies the mediation of Christ, through whom alone religious services can meet the approbation of God. Christian baptism, as we verily believe, on Scriptural authority, has been appointed in the room of circumcision. It is at once the solemn duty and the precious privilege of pious parents to present their infants to God in this evangelical ordinance. They are baptized in the name of the Son, as well as of the Father and of the Holy Spirit. But why baptize them in his name, if they are not included in his mediation? Baptism does not constitute, but implies the relation which infants sustain to the Savior. By baptism this relation is publicly recognized. Take away the relation, and you divest baptism of that importance which renders it worthy the wisdom of God. The baptism, therefore, of infants, declares the fact that they are included in the mediation of Christ.

I am the way, said the Savior, *no man cometh to the Father but by me*. This is equally true of offerings presented to God. Unless they are presented through Christ, they will not be accepted. *He that honoreth not the Son*, by presenting his offering through him, *honoreth not the Father*. Cain presented his offering directly, without any reference to a Mediator; it was therefore rejected. Abel presented his by faith in the promised *seed of the woman*; it was therefore accepted. Infants, no more than other offerings, will not be accepted, unless they are presented through Christ. All men, in all their religious offerings and services, must honor the Son as they honor the Father.

To pray for their infant children is the duty and the privilege of all pious parents. This they promise to do when they present them to God in baptism; this the ambassador of Christ does when he administers the ordinance; and this every member of that church into which they are received ought to do. This prayer is for spiritual blessings, of which the water used in baptism is an emblem. This prayer has no meaning, unless these infants are capable of receiving the blessings for which the prayer is offered. That they are capable of this, is evident from the text; for Jesus himself blessed those infants which were brought to him. But all spiritual blessings are bestowed through Christ; they cannot receive them unless they are included in the mediation of Christ. This prayer is, to say the least, useless; this emblem is useless, if they cannot receive these blessings. Those parents are worthy of compassion who can persuade themselves that their infant children are thus excluded from Christ, and that they are relieved from the duty of praying for them.

II. Our second remark is, that infants are subjects of the moral government of God. By this they are distinguished from all other animals. These sustain the relation of creatures to their Creator, and are subjects of the government of Providence. They sustain no moral relations to God, and are not treated according to the principles of moral government. Infants, too, are the creatures of God, and are under the government of his providence; but, in addition to this, they sustain the relation to him of subjects of his moral government. His treatment of them is in accordance with this relation. The ground of this relation is, that they belong to a race of rational being, and possess immortal spirits. This follows from the conclusion of the preceding remarks, that they are included in the mediation of Christ. For if they are included in this

mediation, they must possess a nature spiritual and immortal. This deathless spirit raises them far above the grade of other animals, and connects them with the moral government of God. The mediation of Christ is of a moral and spiritual nature, and requires in those included in it, a correspondent character. This mediation, therefore, connects all whom it embraces with the moral department of Jehovah's government.

The difference between a subject of a moral government and a moral agent is very obvious. The agent is required to act according to a moral law; and this obligation is grounded on the fact of his possessing faculties which fit him for this action. The subject is treated according to moral principles, and requires a nature adapted to this treatment. The man who is a moral agent was once an infant, and then only the subject of a moral government. The infant, if spared, will be a moral agent. The moral agent is also the subject of this government; the infant is advancing to moral agency. The infant possesses an immortal spirit which connects it with the moral government of God; as the faculties of the mind unfold, as the exercise of reason increases, moral agency commences and increases in the same degree.

Brutes never thus rise from a lower to a higher department in Jehovah's dominion. They remain the subjects of the government of Providence, from which they are never transferred in any sense or degree, to a state of moral discipline or responsibility. Their instinctive propensities are the same the first, that they are the last year of life. No wisdom is gained from experience. They select their food, and their places of shelter and repose, with the same discrimination at one time as at another. In this respect, their infancy, their mature life, and their old age, are alike. Whatever may be the power of thought which they possess: whatever the glimmerings of reason which they exhibit; yet, as far as we can judge, they are as incapable of receiving the knowledge of God and his perfections, of a moral law and its claims, of a state of future rewards and punishments, as the earth itself on which they live. Widely different is the character of human beings. The infant man may be far more helpless than they, yet he is linked to the moral government of God by an immortal spirit, an immaterial mind, possessing faculties which, though dormant for a time, will wake up to consciousness and activity. As these faculties unfold and mature, he becomes capable of receiving the knowledge of God and his perfections, of the moral law and its claims, of rewards and punishments, as the consequence of obedience or disobedience to this law. As he becomes capable of receiving this knowledge, he becomes a moral agent, and is accountable for his conduct.

A similar difference between a subject and an agent exists in the civil government. Infants have rights which are secured by the civil law. By this protection they are recognized as belonging to the government, although they can exercise no civil power. In the moral government it is the development of the mental faculties, which is gradual and in different degrees at different times, which constitutes moral agency. In the civil government the law itself determines the period when agency commences. The period of agency is not the same for all purposes: a man must be twenty-one years of age before he can make a valid contract, or give his vote at an election; but whatever his talents and qualifications may be, he must be thirty before he can fill the office and exercise the power of chief magistrate. Those who are now agents were first minors, and no more than subjects of government. Those who are now minors will, at the different periods fixed by the law, become agents, and may be employed in all the offices of government. Minors, before they reach the lowest degree of civil agency, may suffer punishment for transgressing the laws of their country. Many a youthful offender has thus suffered for the good of the community. The difference, in the civil government, between infants as minors and irrational animals is quite obvious. These

ain no other relation to government than as a species of property, animal, the owner by law. No man forfeits his life by killing a horse or an ox; but he forfeits to the owner only the value of the animal. The murder of an ox, however, is death as certainly and as deservedly as that of an adult. An infant is a subject, and may one day be an active and useful agent of the Government.

But the church is a moral, not a civil community, will be admitted by all. The kingdom, said the Savior, is not of this world. A connection, then, with the church is a connection with the moral government of God. Under the former dispensation, by the rite of circumcision, infants were recognized as members of the church, or as belonging to the congregation of the Lord. They are now received by baptism. They are given to the church in the name of the Lord, and in the name of the Lord the church receives them, and promises to educate them for his service and his kingdom. It will, perhaps, be alleged, that mere animals were, in religious service, dedicated to God; and yet they are not subjects of the moral government, and that neither, therefore, does the dedication of infants prove their connection with this government. We admit the dedication of the first born was typical, and, for the sake of argument, though by no means certain, that circumcision was also typical; and yet our conclusion remains unshaken. The whole system of types and shadows, having been fulfilled in Christ, has vanished away; and yet, in the ordinance of baptism, infants are presented to God, and received by the church as visible members.

In praying for infants, it is chiefly spiritual blessings for which we ask; those connected with salvation, and suited to the spiritual and immortal nature of the soul. We believe, when offering this prayer, that God can bestow, and that they can receive these blessings. But these blessings, as we have seen, are bestowed through Christ alone, and are therefore confined to the moral government: those, of course, who receive them, must be connected with this government.

III. Our next remark is, that infants must be considered, in the sight of God, as guilty; they cannot be entirely innocent. This follows as a consequence from both the preceding topics of remark.

The term *guilt* is said to be derived from two German words, signifying to *pay a fine*. A guilty person, therefore, is one who is liable to pay a fine, or a debt. In the moral government this can be done only by suffering; and as this suffering is according to the sentence of a law, it is punishment, or penal suffering. Careful attention to all the passages of Scripture where the term *guilty* is found, will show that this is the most obvious meaning, the leading idea of the word: a liability to suffer. If there are passages of which this is doubtful, they are very few. If it be supposed that this liability implies some uncertainty respecting the result; that the guilty person may, or may not suffer; to this we observe, that this uncertainty relates exclusively to the time of suffering, not to the possibility of final escape. This liability involves obligation; the guilty person is bound to suffer; and is liable to it at any time when it may please the *Judge of all the earth* to visit him. The possibility of escape would imply weakness or indifference in the executor of the law.

Our remarks relate to the fact, that infants are guilty, not to the degree of that guilt; with perfect accuracy this is estimated by the Judge; nor, at present, to the manner in which they become guilty; our ignorance of this manner cannot alter the fact of their being guilty. We are ignorant of the manner in which the mind is united with the body and exerts a positive influence over it; and yet this ignorance does not alter the fact of this union, and of this influence. After the preceding remarks, we take it as a truth fully established, that infants are included in the mediation of Christ; and if this is

admitted, we cannot see how to escape the conclusion that the for none but the guilty can possibly need a Savior. *The whole are guilty; physician, but they that are sick.* If infants are not sick, they need not a physician. *Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost.* If no physician lost, they cannot be saved. What would you think of the physician who gravely tells you that he is about to restore a man to health, who is who time, perfectly free from disease? or, of the shepherd, who shows the fess to seek one of his sheep, when that sheep is safe in the field? The physician cannot restore a man to health who is not diseased; the shepherd cannot find a sheep which is not lost. The kind and gracious purpose of *Ca* in coming into the world was, by his sufferings and death, to make an atonement for sin; to procure pardon for the guilty; and to render this pardon consistent with the justice of God. But not one pang of these sufferings was endured, not one drop of this blood was shed, no pardon was procured for infants, if they are not guilty; plainly because they do not need it. The death of Christ, as to them, was in vain. Those who are not guilty, need not, and, in truth, cannot be pardoned. Those who die in infancy never can enter heaven through Christ, never can be vessels of that mercy which flows through Christ, unless they are guilty. They must enter that blessed state through some other door than that which Christ has opened; must wear other robes than those washed in the blood of the Lamb. If you contend that they are not guilty, you dash from their lips the cup of salvation through the blood of Christ; you snatch from them the arms of mercy, and bolt against them that door of heaven, through which all the redeemed of the Lord will enter.

That infants are connected, as subjects, with the moral government of God, is a truth which will not be denied; that they suffer, under this government, is a fact which comes under our own observation. They are, therefore, guilty, or they suffer contrary to the principles of this government. Justice is one of the moral attributes of Deity; and one, too, which characterizes every part of his moral administration. That it is unjust for those who are, in all respects, innocent, to suffer, is a truth so obvious, that nothing can be plainer whence proof can be adduced. That infinite justice will not inflict suffering without a cause, is a truth which strikes the mind with all the force and clearness of intuition. That these sufferings are sent and controlled by the appointment of heaven is abundantly taught in the Bible. *Affliction cometh not forth of the earth; neither doth trouble spring out of the ground. And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick.* Both the degree and continuance of these afflictions are according to the will of God. This is implied in the prayers that we are permitted to offer to God for infants, that they may be relieved from suffering, and preserved from death; and in our grateful acknowledgment to the *Preserver of men*, when this relief and this preservation are granted. Our prayers imply our firm belief that God is able to do what we ask, either to preserve them from affliction, or relieve them when afflicted; and thus *hold their souls in life*. This belief is founded on his word and the dispensations of his providence; for while we witness the suffering and death of hundreds and thousands of infants, hundreds and thousands are preserved through all the dangers of this early and helpless period till mature age. What he does for a part he could do for the whole, if it was according to his wise and holy purpose; *for unto God the Lord belong the issues from death*—the outgoings of death. The sufferings and death of infants take place according to the design of God, as certainly as do those of adults: a design as explicit, distinct, and immutable, as that according to which the heavens and the earth were created. If it is his intention to preserve them, though tender and helpless as the morning flower, nothing can hurt them; *he will be their help and their shield*. But if it is his intention to remove them, the wind has only to pass over them and they are gone. No

parental solicitude, no medical skill can possibly save them. *Their breath is in his hand in him they live, and move, and have their being.*

Now the question is, are these sufferings just or are they unjust? *Is there unrighteousness with God? Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?* Just, there must be a cause; a cause, too, that will justify them, if the sufferings are in the sight of God, but also in the view of holy, intelligent beings. We cannot think of no cause but guilt; those who suffer, therefore, are guilty. Why may be alleged that brutes also suffer, and yet they are not guilty. Why not infants, therefore, suffer and yet not be guilty? The analogy between them is not complete; and, therefore, reasoning from one to another, when this analogy fails, cannot be conclusive. The tree of the forest is smitten by the lightning from heaven and is killed; why may not the life of the animal be destroyed without suffering? The tree is a creature of God, is under his providence, and is smitten by his hand as well as the animal. In all these respects the analogy between them is complete; and yet there is one thing in the nature of the animal which does not belong to the tree, and which is not included in this analogy; that is, sensation, or the capacity of feeling pain. The animal is a sentient being, and as such sustains a relation to the Creator which the tree does not. Now, every one can see, in a moment, that reasoning on the subject of suffering from the tree to the animal, will not be conclusive; that because the tree may be shattered and yet feel no pain, that therefore the bones of the animal may be broken without pain. To make the reasoning conclusive requires the tree to possess a nature not given to it by the Creator. From its very nature, the tree is as incapable of pain as it is of speech or of thought; the animal, from its nature, must necessarily feel pain from the stroke of violence. So the infant and the mere animal are alike the creatures of God, are subjects of his providence, and are sentient beings; but here the analogy fails. And yet there is one important feature in the character of the infant which the animal does not possess, and which, of course, is not included in this analogy. The infant possesses an immortal spirit which connects it with the moral government of God; the animal does not possess this immortal spirit, and for want of this link, never can be, in any sense, connected with moral government. For the want of this nature, the animal can no more belong to the moral government than the tree can to the sentient part of creation. Moral principles can have no more application to the one, than those of sensation can in the other. By this immortality, this moral relation to the great Jehovah, the infant rises infinitely higher above the animal, than the animal rises above the tree. Now guilt is as strictly confined to the moral government as feeling is to a sentient being; it is as impossible for the animal to be guilty, as it is for the tree to feel. When guilt, therefore, is the subject of consideration, reasoning from the suffering of animals to that of infants cannot be conclusive. They do not possess the same nature; do not belong to the same government; are not treated according to the same principles. Produce moral subjects suffering without guilt, and the correctness of the reasoning will be admitted. Until a degree of light which we do not possess is shed on this deeply interesting subject, we must honestly believe that the suffering of infants proves the fact that they are guilty.

When we pray, it should be *with the spirit and with the understanding also*. We should distinctly understand the meaning of the words which we employ; should have some definite idea of the blessings for which we pray. When, in praying for infants, we entreat God to be merciful to them, what do we mean? Do we ask God to do what is impossible! to save those from suffering who are not liable to it? to pardon those who are not guilty? No; but we ask God, through the *exceeding riches of his grace, and for Christ's sake*, to pardon those who are guilty; to save them from sufferings which they

deserve. If this petition—one of the most precious which we are to offer—has any meaning, those for whom it is offered are guilty. ^{permitted}

The baptism of infants is not an unmeaning ceremony; it is an ^{office of} divine appointment, both impressive and instructive. The water is ^{used} for the sake of cleansing the body, but as an emblem of the blood ^{which is the blood of sprinkling, and which cleanses from all sin.} ^{Christ,} which is the *blood of sprinkling*, and which *cleanses from all sin*. ^{applied} ^{away} ^{the water} apply the emblem of this blood if there is not guilt to be washed ^{of course, the subjects of this baptism are guilty. Nothing else can require} moral defilement from which the soul needs to be purified? If the water ^{is needed} applied by divine appointment, that blood of which it is an emblem, ^{is needed} of course, the subjects of this baptism are guilty. Nothing else can require the pardoning merit and purifying efficacy of this blood.

To the feelings of some parental hearts, it may be considered unwelcome, perhaps repulsive and even cruel, to allege that infants are guilty. Is it, then more grateful to believe that infants are excluded from the mediation of Christ cut off from the mercy of God, and, of course, that they cannot be ^{partaken} of the blessings of salvation through the compassionate Savior? Would this belief, this view of their character and relations to God, be the source whence we would derive consolation, if, in the wise and holy providence of God, we are called to resign them to the grave? We appeal to all pious parents who have experienced these afflictive bereavements, if, when shedding the ^{parting} tear, they did not derive their chief consolation from the tender mercy of God, through the kind Redeemer, and not from the justice of God without a Savior! True it is, that our belief cannot change the truth; whether they be innocent or guilty, they are so, independently of our belief; yet we are certainly responsible for all the fair and legitimate consequences of this belief. We repeat, therefore, that if infants are not guilty, they cannot be included in the mediation of Christ—cannot be interested in the merit of his atoning blood—cannot be partakers of his salvation. If, in their dying moments, we commit them to God, it must be to his justice, not to his mercy.

IV. The next and last remark is, that infants are included in the covenant made with Adam; the conditions of which seem to have been, that his obedience would secure happiness, perfect, immutable, and eternal, to all his posterity; that his disobedience would subject himself and all his posterity to the penalty annexed to the law. The promise of life, as a reward of obedience, is, indeed, not understood; nor was it necessary that it should be. It was quite sufficient to state distinctly that death would be the certain consequence of transgression. He is already in possession of life, of which nothing but disobedience can deprive him. When the civil law makes death the punishment of crime, it does not promise life as the reward of obedience. The security of life already possessed is implied in the threatening. If Adam was obedient, during the time of probation, innocence and happiness would be secured to him and his posterity. True, it is not explicitly stated that infants, or any part of his posterity, were included in this covenant, generally called the covenant of works; but neither is it so stated that Eve was included. The language is addressed to Adam alone, in the singular number: and yet it is certain that she was included. It is equally certain that infants were. If Adam had obeyed, his offspring, during the period of infancy, would have been secure from suffering and death; that they suffer the penalty of disobedience, is a fact which cannot be denied. That they suffer justly, or because they are guilty, is a truth established by the preceding remarks. But this cannot be the guilt of actual transgression, or of sin which they, as moral agents, have committed; because infancy is that part of human life which precedes this agency. The commencement of moral agency, in any degree, is, in the same degree, the close of infancy. To be infants, in the sense in which we use the term, and at the same time, to be moral agents, is impossible. We cannot,

therefore, see any possible way of escaping the conclusion that they suffer on account of the guilt of "Adam's first sin"—that sin which he committed as their representative; and, of course, that they were included in the covenant made with him.

This doctrine, if we mistake not, is plainly taught in the holy Scriptures. Rom. 5:12. "Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Death, the penalty of that law which Adam transgressed, is suffered by infants. This death entered by sin as its punishment; and this sin is the sin of one man: the *one offence* of this one man. This one man, therefore, was the representative of his posterity, and acted for them, so that they, as justly and as certainly, as if they had acted individually for themselves, should enjoy the blessings secured by his obedience, and suffer the punishment due to his offence. The following context illustrates and confirms this view of the subject. The only other passage we will adduce is, 1 Cor. 15:22. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." The apostle is here treating of the resurrection of the body; of course, by death, he means, not spiritual, but natural death; exclusively the death of the body. It is not true that all, in a spiritual sense, shall be made alive in Christ; but it is strictly true, that *all who are in the graves*, both the righteous and the wicked, *shall hear his voice and shall come forth*. From the fact which the apostle assumes, that all die in Adam, he affirms the certainty and the universality of the resurrection from the dead. Admit that Paul reasoned conclusively, then, believing in the resurrection, you believe in the fact which he assumes. If all die in Adam, then he represented all, and acted for all, when the penalty of death was incurred.

The result of the preceding remarks is this: 1. Infants are included in the mediation of Christ, and may be partakers of his salvation. Therefore, 2. They are subjects of the moral government of God. Of course, 3. They are guilty. And finally, 4. They were represented by Adam in the covenant of works.

From this subject we infer two duties relating to infants: baptism and prayer.

1. It is, at once, the privilege and the duty of Christian parents to devote their infants to God in the holy ordinance of baptism; and thus have their membership in the visible church publicly and solemnly recognized.

That circumcision was, by the appointment of God, applied to the infants of his professed worshipers, none will deny. That it was an ordinance of the gospel, an outward and visible sign of the spiritual blessings given through Christ, we sincerely believe. It was first enjoined on Abraham, more than four hundred years before the law was given by Moses. According to an inspired apostle, Rom. 4:11, Abraham "received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised." The faith of Abraham, and of all who believe since the death of Christ, is essentially the same, having the same reliance on the atonement of Christ. Hence he is *their father*, and they are *his children*. If their faith is evangelical, so was his. If circumcision was the sign and seal of his faith, baptism is of theirs. If they have the gospel preached to them, so had Abraham the same gospel preached to him. Gal. 3:8. "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel to Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed." This promise was the gospel, which Abraham understood and believed. It was also the most important part of that covenant which God made with Abraham, and which was confirmed to him of God *in Christ*; and if in Christ, then it was an evangelical covenant. Circumcision was the *token* of this covenant; the *sign* and *seal* by which it was

confirmed. Circumcision was, therefore, an ordinance of the gospel; and as such was applied to infants. Christ has redeemed us, "that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ." This is not any blessing which Abraham confers on his children by faith; nor is it the blessing of entering into the earthly Canaan; but it was the blessing which God promised to Abraham and to his seed in Christ; the blessing of the gospel secured in that covenant, of which circumcision was the token and the seal. "So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham;" that is, they enjoy the same spiritual blessings and privileges which he did. "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Heirs, not of his temporal, but of his spiritual possessions. One of the blessings enjoyed by Abraham was the privilege of having his children received as members of the visible church, by affixing the token and the seal of the covenant to them. If his children by faith in Christ are blessed with him, they enjoy the same privilege. This blessing has come upon them. They inherit this part of their father's possessions. If they do not enjoy this privilege, then he was more fully blessed than they are. His blessing, in all its rich abundance, has not come on them. They are deprived of this part of their inheritance. The covenant, though "confirmed of God in Christ," has been *disannulled*. If they do not enjoy this privilege, we must believe all this to be true, or deny that there is any blessing, any spiritual advantage, connected with membership in the visible church. Now, although we do not believe that salvation is inseparably confined to this membership, yet certainly it does not follow that there are no advantages connected with it. Because a man may recover from sickness without a physician, and without medicine, it does not follow that there is no advantage derived from medicine prescribed by a competent physician. Because men may live, for a time, in a state of anarchy, it does not follow that there are no advantages derived from a well-ordered civil government. So, although salvation is not confined within the pale of the visible church, yet God has promised to this church, of course, to each individual member of it, great and numerous blessings. Hence it always has been, and ever will be, an object of desire to belong to the congregation of the Lord, to the fold of Christ.

But, perhaps, you will ask, what benefits can infants derive from membership? Your question is what logicians call, begging the question, taking for granted the very point to be ascertained. The meaning of your inquiry is, that, in your opinion, they can derive *no* advantage from this relation. Of course, if you had organized the church, you would have excluded infants. And as you consider this the only correct opinion on the subject, you suppose that God has acted as you would have done, and in forming his church has also excluded them. By circumcision infants were formerly received as members of the church. He that was not circumcised, "that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant." The neglect, not the performance of this rite, was a violation of the covenant, a rejection of the principle on which the church is formed, and, of course, was rebellion against God. Your question might have been proposed to Abraham and the pious Hebrews with as much propriety as to us. What reply would they have made? God permits us to bring our infants with us into his church; we will, therefore, thankfully enjoy it as a privilege. God commands it as a duty; we will, therefore, cheerfully obey, and leave it with him to bless his own ordinance. We will not call his wisdom in question by supposing, for a moment, that he has appointed a useless rite in his church. We will *plant and water*; he will *give the increase*. We adopt this, for the present, as our reply to your question.

Neither wishing nor intending to pervert the apostle's language, or use it in any other than its most obvious sense, we affirm that it is the privilege and

the duty of all parents to have their infants baptized; and by this rite, performed by a minister of the gospel, to have their membership in the church of Christ acknowledged. If this duty is neglected, not the infants, but the parents, are accountable to God for the guilt of this neglect. Those infants, who are thus neglected, are *cut off from the people of God*, and are deprived of the blessings connected with the church. Baptism is now, as circumcision formerly was, the ordinance by which members are received; if not, there is no such ordinance now in the church. 1 Cor. 12:13. "For by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body;" that is, the church. The former rite was discontinued by that synod which met in Jerusalem; but baptism will remain while there is a church on earth. Accordingly, when the Savior commissioned the apostles to *disciple all nations*, that is, to form them into churches, he commanded them, not to circumcise, but to baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

2. Prayer is another duty, incumbent on all parents, in behalf of their infant children. They cannot instruct them, give them a new heart, or confer on them the blessings of salvation; but they can ask of God, who can accomplish this work and bestow these blessings; and who has promised to hear the prayer of faith, offered in the name of Christ. Parents, rejoicing themselves in the hopes of the gospel, cannot suppress the desire that their infants, so helpless and dependent as they are, should be embraced in the arms of redeeming mercy, be washed in the blood of Christ, and finally enter into the joy of their Lord. This desire, offered up to God, is prayer; and the privilege of offering it up will be esteemed precious, in proportion to the sincerity of their own piety, and the tenderness of their parental affections. Nor will they be perplexed or discouraged in the discharge of this duty by the question suggested by unbelief: *How* can infants, who can neither believe nor repent, be partakers of salvation? They are not required to bestow this salvation; it is the *gift of God*; and, therefore, a knowledge of the manner in which God bestows it, is neither essential to their own safety, nor their faithful discharge of duty. They know not *how* the Spirit operates on their own minds; and yet they do not cease to pray for his gracious aid. They rejoice in the fact, that infants are included in the mediation of Christ, and that this is not a vain participation. This Savior, who is *mighty to save*, who can *save to the uttermost*, can apply to them the merit of his death, and this will secure their salvation. He can bless them now, though in heaven, as effectually as he did when on earth, when they were in his own arms. Who can say this blessing did not include salvation!

But prayer is not only the duty of parents, but of the whole church, and especially when the ordinance of baptism is administered. When the church calls a minister of the gospel to labor among them, they call him to discharge this duty, as well as all others, which are peculiar to his office. When, therefore, he administers the ordinance of baptism, he acts for those who have called him in the name of the church. The parents give to God and to the church a solemn pledge that they will pray for these infants, and "train them up in the way in which they should go." The obligation rests on the church to pray for these members, now received into the family of God, and to see that they receive a religious education. If both the parents should be taken away, it is the duty of the church, a duty which cannot be neglected without criminality, to appoint and authorize other agents to take charge of these orphans, and "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." If the church was found in the faithful discharge of these duties, attending, with parental affection, to the religious education of all her children, praying for them without ceasing, the results would furnish an answer to the question—What benefits can infants derive from baptism? The church may neglect her duty. This does not prove, however, that the faithful discharge of this duty is not

blessed of God, and followed with the happiest effects. If some do *not believe*, does this make the *faith of God without effect*? If some disobey the law, does this prove that the law is *not good*? that in keeping it there is not *great reward*? If the prayer of *one righteous man availeth much*, will the prayer of the whole church for these infants, now received into her bosom, avail less? We protest, most earnestly, against that opinion, and that paralyzing apathy, the result of this opinion, which reduces this ordinance to a mere ceremony, in which none but the parents and the minister have any interest. Infant baptism, when viewed in its true light, in all its bearings and relations, is both instructive and impressive; calculated to call forth the spirit of true devotion, and of earnest prayer in every breast. Those members of the church who take no part in the devotional exercises, who consider themselves only as witnesses, prove by this indifference, either, that they are criminally ignorant of the nature and design of this ordinance, or, that their hearts are cold and lifeless in the cause of Christ. Such members need to be "instructed in the way of the Lord more perfectly."

There are parents in our Christian country, who live in the habitual, and as we verily believe, criminal neglect of these duties; who never devote their infants to God in baptism, never ask the church to receive them to her bosom, to exercise over them her kind and maternal influence; who never pray for them; who devise plans and employ means to promote their temporal comfort, but never ask God to give them spiritual blessings. These neglected infants are sometimes removed by death. Then those parents attempt to comfort their bleeding hearts with the hope that their dear little babes are saved through Christ, and are happy with the redeemed of the Lord. But what reason have they to cherish this hope? How do they know that they are saved? They never thought this salvation worth asking for—never used the means of *grace* which have a reference to infants—how then do they know that they are happy? Parents who faithfully discharge their duty; who devote them to God; who request the church to "receive these little ones in the name of Christ," to watch over and pray for them; whose fervent and daily prayer to God is, that they might be saved: these parents, if bereaved of these objects of affection, have reasons for this hope and this belief. These reasons are derived from "the blood of Christ which cleanses from all sin," from their own prayers, and the prayers of the church. If God saves a guilty and helpless sinner, because he prays for it; if he heard Moses in behalf of Israel, Job's prayer for his friends, the church for Peter, will he not hear the parents and the church for these infants? When the Judge shall say to them, at the last day, "Come ye blessed of my Father"—ye lambs of my flock—"inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," he may assign as a reason for this sentence—For your parents devoted you to God, and prayed for you; the church received you in my name, and prayed for your salvation.