

A N  
E S S A Y  
ON  
B A P T I S M.

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BY DAVID RICE.

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Φωνὴ Βαπτιστῶν ἐν τῇ κηρῶν εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ.—JOHN i. 29.

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# The P R E F A C E.

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**T**H E author consented to the publication of the following *Essay*, not from any ambition to be known as a writer, or expectation of obtaining the applause of men of education and taste; but because he was persuaded, by those whose judgment he prefers to his own, that it might be useful to the plain christian; and in preparing it for public view, he had their capacities constantly in his eye. He believes it to be one of those humble productions that will never be seen in a second edition. In the prosecution of his subject he has mentioned, with freedom, what he looks upon to be faults in other societies, as well as his own. Finding it necessary to refer to these, he thought it more generous and friendly to do it in an open way, than by obscure hints and sly insinuations: and takes this opportunity to declare, that he esteems that society, from which he most widely differs in the second section, to be a valuable and important branch of the protestant reformed church.

He did not undertake to write on this trite subject with a view of producing any new arguments, or of collecting all which have been used by others, but from a desire to make some things a little more plain to the unlearned, and to lay before them the principal arguments for the church-membership of children, in order to prepare the way for the following addresses and for a practical improvement of the subject. He means not by this production of his pen to make a declaration of war against any other society, but to reform his own, and that chiefly in their practice.—Finding it exceedingly difficult, in so great a number of addresses, to avoid frequent repetitions of the same thoughts, and almost the same expressions, he finally concluded it better to admit those inelegancies into his *Essay*, than to omit saying, what appeared to him to be proper, to any one character.

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# AN ESSAY ON BAPTISM.

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## THE INTRODUCTION.

**T**HE great object of the christian religion is to train up men, by a life of piety and virtue, for the service and enjoyment of GOD. They are found sunk into a state of sin, ignorant of GOD and of themselves, and unaffected with their miserable condition. In order to their recovery, it is necessary that they be instructed in the knowledge of GOD and of the nature and extent of the duty he requires of them ; the obligations they are under to fear, love and obey him ; the evil of sin, and the great wretchedness of that state to which it has reduced them ; of the abundant goodness of GOD in providing an all-sufficient Saviour, and of the nature and method of that salvation proposed in the gospel. It is also necessary that their hearts be deeply impressed with a sense of the absolute necessity, and great importance, of these things. The outward ordinances of the gospel, baptism and the LORD'S supper, have this important object in view, and are appointed as means of accomplishing the same end. They are principally designed to impress the mind, in a more deep and sensible way, with the leading truths revealed to us in the sacred scriptures.

**B**UT in the dark ages of the christian church, when it was overrun with ignorance, superstition and idolatry, these outward ordinances of the gospel were greatly corrupted. Men were then taught, that when the elements were consecrated by a Priest, GOD communicated to them a saving virtue ; that there was in the ordinance of the supper a transmutation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of CHRIST, and that the subjects of baptism were, in that ordinance, regenerated. These

These errors were supported by some passages of scripture taken in a literal sense, which ought undoubtedly to be understood in a figurative sense : for instance, by the expressions, *This is my body*, and *this is my blood*, in the institution of the supper, it was asserted that the real body and blood of CHRIST were present, and actually received, in that ordinance ; though the meaning evidently is, that these elements were outward signs of the body and blood of CHRIST. *Do this in remembrance of me* undoubtedly signifies, receive this as a memorial of my love, and as an expression of your love to me. By misunderstanding the same figure, baptism was styled regeneration ; though it is evidently only a sign of it.

THESE ordinances, when thus corrupted, were esteemed essentially necessary to salvation, and religion made greatly to consist in the punctual observance of these and other external ceremonies. In this state of religion, it was not strange that purity of heart, and holiness of life, were little understood, or regarded.

THE human mind is not able to free itself from ancient prejudices all at once ; or if it does, it is apt to run into opposite extremes : and hence those eminent and faithful servants of GOD, who were the instruments of the reformation, retained, or run into, several errors, which have been greatly prejudicial to the interest of religion, and the unhappy occasion of much contention amongst its professors. This observation, I think, has been remarkably verified with regard to the ordinance of baptism. Through mistakes and misrepresentations, a thick cloud of darkness has long hung over this institution of CHRIST ; so that even to this day many Christians do not rightly understand the nature and use of it. They either treat it as a matter of mere form, a trifling insignificant ceremony ; or else, by overrating it, make it more efficacious and essential to salvation than it really is ; and in both cases, evidently mistake its proper use and application, as one of the appointed means of grace.

THE established church of England have called it regeneration, and left it doubtful whether they understood the expression in a figurative or literal sense.

THE members of this church have so often heard thanks returned to GOD for regenerating children in baptism, that they are taught thereby to expect no other regeneration, and even to

to deny the necessity of it. Though the Presbyterians are a little farther reformed in this point, yet, I apprehend, that much of the same mist of darkness hangs over this church also; at least that a number of the members of it have not clear conceptions of the nature and use of the ordinance. The eagerness of many parents to have their children baptized, while they habitually neglect many religious duties of equal, or greater, importance; their great displeasure when denied this privilege, though for scandalous immoralities; their heavy complaints that their children should suffer the want of baptism, on account of their bad lives; and their great ignorance of the proper use of the ordinance, make it too evident that they do not understand the institution; but vainly imagine that there is efficacy in it, and that children receive advantage from it, in a way that neither reason nor the word of GOD will warrant. It appears also that the Baptists misunderstand and overrate this sacred institution; and therefore expect more from it than they have any ground for. This I infer from their great zeal in harranguing on the subject, their eagerness in persuading persons to be rebaptized, and their using it as an argument with such, that they will enjoy more of the divine presence, and of the comforts of religion, after their immersion, than they do before. The sudden change of their language, after baptism, from a modest self-diffidence, to a very confident assurance, seems to originate from the same source; unless it arises from the testimony of the church in favour of their conversion.

A number of professing christians, observing their brethren running into these errors, and viewing the ordinance of baptism as thus abused to pernicious purposes, have probably in the warmth of a well-meant zeal, entirely rejected it, together with that of the supper, and spiritualized several plain passages of scripture into error and nonsense.

THE long and zealous debates that have arisen on this subject, and some other similar points, have induced others, though not Quakers in principle, to treat baptism with great indifference; and thus to despise, or neglect, one of the means of grace appointed by JESUS CHRIST for the edification of his church.

WITH a view to cast some light on this subject, and especially to inform the judgment, confirm the faith, and direct

the practice of those of my own persuasion, I shall inquire into the general nature and use of the ordinance of baptism ;—who are its proper subjects ;—what are the advantages of baptism to children ;—in what manner parents ought to give up their children to GOD in baptism ;—and what is the proper mode of administration ;—and then conclude with addresses to persons of several characters.

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## SECTION I.

**W**E shall, in the first place, inquire into the general nature and use of the ordinance of baptism.

**BAPTISM** is an ordinance of **JESUS CHRIST**, wherein, according to his appointment, the body is washed with water, in the name of the Trinity, to represent and signify to us the washing away the moral impurity of sin, by the renewing of the Holy Ghost. It is an outward sign, that the person baptized is dedicated to **GOD**, and received and acknowledged as a member of his visible church ; and a seal which **GOD** has annexed to the gospel dispensation of the covenant of grace, as a token of that relation, which subsists between him and his church, his faithfulness to his promises, and the obligation of church-members to live to his glory.

**THE** sealing the covenant by baptism, or any other ordinance, is a very different thing from the sealing of the **SPIRIT**. The **SPIRIT** by which believers are sealed to the day of redemption, witnesses with their spirits that they are the children of **GOD**, and seals the grace and love of **GOD** on their consciences : but baptism, in itself, is only an external seal, annexed by divine appointment to the external dispensation of his grace, as an outward pledge of his love to his people, and as a means of exciting, strengthening, and expressing their faith. The one is an evidence of grace *to* the soul, the other a means of exciting grace *in* the soul.

**CHRIST**, in appointing this and other ordinances of the gospel, did not act merely as a sovereign arbitrary lawgiver ; but had holy, wise and gracious ends in view : he aimed at the good of his church, and the advancement of his own glory, in the salvation of sinners. Baptism does not operate by any innate power, it has no saving virtue communicated to it, nei-

ther does the special grace of **GOD** inseparably attend it. It operates only as a mean appointed by **GOD**, and as such, promotes the salvation of men, when rightly used by them, and attended with a divine blessing.

**WHEN GOD** works by means on the minds of men, he does not consider and treat them as machines, or as a workman does his materials ; but he deals with them as is suitable to their rational nature : he instructs them in the knowledge of religion, and lays proper motives before them to the love of **GOD** and practice of holiness. The means he uses are suited in their nature, and designed by him to operate in this rational way, and, as far as I understand, in no other way. If **GOD** works on the minds of men in any other way, I apprehend, it is not by means at all, but by an immediate exertion of power.

If we consider this ordinance as the baptism of repentance, it has a tendency to excite in our minds a penitent sense of sin, and engage our hearts to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. If we consider it as a sign of purity of heart, it has a tendency to humble us under a sense of our moral impurity, and excite suitable desires and endeavours after holiness of heart and life. If we consider it as a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, it tends to fill us with admiration of the goodness and faithfulness of **GOD**, and encourage us to accept of his offered mercy, and live by faith on his many great and precious promises. If we consider it as a dedication to **GOD**, its natural tendency is to impress our minds with a due sense of our obligations to him, and engage us to live to his glory. So that this, and the other means of grace, produce their effect, or answer their end, by promoting, according to their natural tendency, the knowledge of **GOD** and divine things ; impressing the minds of men with a deep and practical sense of their reality and importance ; and handing down the knowledge of religion from one generation to another. For these ends the word and ordinances of the gospel are to be administered, and the discipline of the church of **CHRIST** exercised.

**OUR** attendance upon these ordinances is not to be considered as meritorious acts in us, by which we procure the grace of **GOD**, as our reward ; but as means appointed by him, and suited in their nature, to bring such ignorant, guilty and unworthy creatures as we are to the proper knowledge of our  
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Maker, and of the obligations we are under to him, to a participation of his grace and the practice of our duty. Attending upon these ordinances then, *merely* because it is our duty so to do, without understanding their nature and end, or without using them so as to promote the knowledge and sense of divine things, cannot be a proper compliance with the will of our Maker, or use of the ordinances which he has appointed, as means of salvation. Should a person be baptized *merely* because he thinks it his duty, or should he only for the same reason, present his children to GOD in baptism; he ignorantly misuses, and, I may add, profanes the ordinance of CHRIST. The zeal of ignorant parents, who understand not the nature and use of the ordinance, to have their children baptized, is not a zeal according to knowledge, but at best a blind, inconsiderate zeal; and those who encourage them to do this, encourage them to do they know not what.

THOSE who are forced by conscience to attend these ordinances, *merely* because they are persuaded it is their duty, or imagine it to be some great privilege which they ought not to slight, and afterwards find peace of mind from the apprehension that they have done their duty, are entertaining a false and destructive peace; and those who administer to this are thus far crying, *peace, peace, when there is no peace*. For instance, when a person thinks he ought to be baptized, or to get his children baptized, is impressed with such a weighty sense of his duty, that he cannot rest until it is done; but immediately after baptism feels serene and happy, though he understands not the end of the ordinance, nor what use he ought to make of it, he is deluded with false comfort; for he is yet far from having done the duty, which in this case was required of him. It is not enough that it is my duty to attend on ordinances, it is not enough that I be deeply sensible of my duty, nay it is not enough that I be a sincere christian; I must also understand and improve them, so as to answer the ends for which they were appointed. It is this blind attendance on gospel ordinances that sinks them into contempt, and is one considerable cause of that profanity and irreligion that prevails among nominal christians.

THE knowledge of religion, without an affecting sense of its excellency and importance, and a heart engaged to embrace it with faith and love, is certainly vain, as to any saving purposes. The great end of the outward ordinances of the gospel was to convey, as means, these impressions of religion to the

the heart ; therefore an attendance on them without such impressions and exercises of mind, is not a profitable and acceptable attendance ; because the most essential part of what God requires is wanting, that is, a right disposition of heart. It should however be carefully observed, that though these ordinances have never answered their end, until these holy impressions are made, yet this is not confined to the moment of our attendance, but may be sometimes before, and sometimes after.

It may not be improper to observe here, that those Ministers fall far short of their duty, who administer sealing ordinances to those who are grossly ignorant of their use, and of the qualifications necessary for a right attendance ; and that, perhaps, without ever inquiring into their knowledge, or taking any proper pains to instruct them. They are called to be Stewards of the mysteries of God, and faithfully to watch for the souls of men ; but yet they suffer these mysteries to be profaned by those, who through ignorance, are unqualified to make any proper use of them. Would to God that we were all suitably diligent and faithful in this important matter ; and that our people were so far freed from pride and obstinacy, and of such an humble and teachable temper, as to bear with plain dealing, and cheerfully receive the necessary instructions.

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## S E C T. II.

**W**E shall, in the second place, inquire who are the proper subjects of baptism.

It is acknowledged by all, except such as deny baptism to be a standing ordinance in the church of CHRIST, that those who sincerely repent of their sins, accept of CHRIST as a Saviour, and subject themselves to him as their King, are proper subjects of this ordinance, on supposition they have never been baptized before. Repentance and faith are necessary qualifications for a right improvement of the ordinance. This is a point so evident from scripture, and so little disputed, that I judge it unnecessary to consume time in proving it.

BUT there is another point of considerable importance, concerning which pious and sensible men have entertained different opinions ; I mean whether the children of believing parents

parents have, from sacred scripture, a right to be baptized. It may not be improper seriously to examine into this point, not with a view to promote a party spirit, or blow up the fire of contention ; but, if possible, to find out and communicate truth.

HERE I would inform my readers that nearly thirty years ago, when no ways biased by interest, and, as far as I can recollect, under no strong attachment to any particular party, and when in possession of the best means of information, I entered into a careful examination of this point : and the result of my inquiry was a persuasion, that there is in the sacred scriptures a sufficient warrant for infant baptism, that it is the duty and privilege of christian parents to devote their children to GOD in that sacred ordinance, and the right and privilege of such children to be acknowledged as members of the visible church, by that external rite. In this belief I have continued ever since ; but not so firmly fixed as to prevent my examining the matter again and again : and the longer and farther I examine, the more full and convincing the evidence in favour of infant baptism appears. However, I acknowledge, that it is a matter of difficulty, that requires considerable attention and careful examination : and am fully persuaded that many, who differ from me, are worthy good men, who are justly entitled to my high esteem and cordial affection. Yet as others have a right to differ from me, and support their sentiments by the strongest arguments they can produce, so I have a right to think for myself, on this and every other subject, and support my opinion, without giving any just offence to christians of any other denomination : especially as I do it to establish those of my own persuasion more firmly in the belief of what appears to me a truth of real importance.

I SHALL not assert, nor attempt to prove, that the baptism of infants is, in express words, commanded in scripture, nor that we have there recorded any example, from which it is undoubtedly evident that infants were baptized by the Apostles ; though amongst several households, it appears highly probable that there were infants. But there are a number of things, that may be undoubtedly proved from scripture, which are no where to be found in express terms ; and our blessed LORD has set us an example in this, where he proves the doctrine of the resurrection, and a future state of existence, from the expression *I am the GOD of Abraham, and the GOD of Isaac, and the GOD of Jacob.* These things appear to be the sense  
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of a number of passages, or are a necessary consequence of what is plainly expressed. It is the sense, and not the words of scripture, that is to be the rule of our faith and practice. If we have the sense, we have what is revealed: but if we have the words ever so exact, and not the sense, we have received no revelation at all. Therefore if it appears to be the sense of scripture that children should be baptized, we have a warrant for it, whether in express words or not. On this principle I shall proceed, and observe

1st. GOD has manifested in his word, both in the old and new testament, a particular, tender and gracious regard to children, has directed to them many kind invitations and made many great and precious promises for their encouragement. He has also made it the duty of all the adult members of his visible church to take special care to train up those for himself, who are committed to their charge. This is so evident that one would naturally suppose, was not the duty neglected by so many professing parents, that every intelligent man, who ever read or heard the bible, must be sensible of it. But if any person doubts it, let him duly consider the following passages of sacred scripture. Prov. viii. 17. *I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me.* Deut. vi. 67. *And these words, which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house—*Chap. xxxi. 11, 12, 13. *When all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy GOD, in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, women and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your GOD, and observe to do all the words of this law: and that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your GOD, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it.* Psalm lxxviii. 5, 6, 7. *For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children. That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children, that they might set their hope in GOD, and not forget the works of GOD; but keep his commandments.* Matt. xix. 13, 14, 15. *Then were brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But JESUS said, suffer little children and forbid them not to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And he*  
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*laid his hands on them.* Eph. vi. 4. *And ye, fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the LORD.* In these passages GOD has been pleased to express a gracious regard to children, in the strongest terms; and to manifest a particular attention to their spiritual interests and religious education. He knew that the prosperity of his church, both under the old and new dispensation, much depended on the care taken to bring up children in the knowledge and fear of GOD, and upon their early devoting themselves to his service.

I do not urge this goodness of GOD as any direct proof of infant baptism; but only for the sake of this observation, that since the Divine Being has manifested such a tender regard to children, and has so solemnly charged their parents with their religious education, it seems by no means incredible or unreasonable in itself, that he should commit them also to the care of his church, and make it the duty of his church, by its officers, to train them up as his disciples in the knowledge of divine things: and that in order to keep up in the church a constant sense of this important duty, they should be solemnly acknowledged as members of that society, and their admission declared by the sacred rite of baptism. Do not parents greatly need stirring up to a diligent performance of their duty? And is it not probable that the careful endeavours, friendly exhortations, and faithful admonitions of the church might be the happy means of exciting their attention, and stirring them up to a diligent and faithful performance? I confess for my part I can see nothing unreasonable or absurd in this. I cannot see any tendency in it, considered in itself, to hinder the salvation of children, or injure the church of CHRIST. From the nature of the thing, I can see no reason to say, that infant baptism came from hell, that the Devil is the author of it, or that it is the great pillar of Popery, and main support of the kingdom of Antichrist. I can discern nothing in it inconsistent with the wisdom and goodness of GOD, or tending to the dishonour of his name or the disgrace of his ordinance. Neither do I imagine it would be any real injury to youth, before they make a public profession of religion themselves, to be under the care of a well ordered christian church, entitled to its instructions and subject to its admonitions, and to have the church under some peculiar ties to plead with GOD in their behalf, and use suitable endeavours for their spiritual edification. I cannot see, that the frequent and solemn administration of the ordinance of baptism in the church, if it should keep

keep up a constant sense of the obligations lying on church-members to perform this duty to young people, would have a natural tendency to do them any essential injury ; to make them more vicious, keep them away from CHRIST, and prevent the salvation of their souls.

**THEREFORE**, if there is any evidence in scripture in favour of infant baptism, these considerations may prevent or remove our prejudices, and dispose our minds the more readily to admit it. I cannot help thinking that the strong prejudices some honest christians have imbibed and entertained against infant baptism have originated in mistakes about its proper use as a mean of grace, and its natural tendency : that they have judged of it without viewing it as it is in itself, but have viewed it as it appears when greatly corrupted and abused ; and, under this unhappy disguise, conceived those prejudices against it, that are not easily removed. When we judge of gospel ordinances, not from their proper use and natural tendency, but from their appearance, when disfigured by the abuse of ignorant or vicious men, our conceptions of them will certainly be wrong. We have been long accustomed to see children presented to baptism, not by their parents, but by sponsors, many of whom were grossly ignorant of the first principles of christianity, or totally careless about their education ; both parents and sponsors have entirely neglected all serious endeavours to bring them up in the knowledge and fear of GOD ; and yet great dependence has been laid on this baptism, as if the bare ceremony ensured the salvation of childrens souls. This, together with the unscriptural ceremonies used in the administration, has a natural tendency, considering men's weakness, and their great inattention to the real nature of things, to induce them to believe that the baptism of children is totally useless, and often very pernicious. Thus the mind receives a bias against it, which renders it incapable of discerning the scripture evidence in its favour ; and therefore it is rejected as a human invention. Others, perhaps, have been so unhappy as to live among Presbyterians of high profession, but little true piety ; who have been warm advocates for infant baptism, spoke of it as a matter of vast importance, and repeatedly entered into very solemn engagements to bring up their children for GOD ; yet nevertheless have neglected family religion, brought up their children in vice and ignorance, set before them a bad example, and been evidently immoral in their conduct before the world. By this the same prejudices have been produced. But no sound argument can be raised against infant baptism from hence ; for it would be arguing, as many do,  
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from the bad practices of the professors of religion, that the principles they profess are erroneous : an argument, which if sound, would prove that there are no good principles existing on any subject.

2. THERE is a relation to CHRIST often mentioned in sacred scripture, which, I think, is a quite different thing from that saving union by faith and love, which is the peculiar privilege of the children of God. By it I understand, a relation to him as members of his visible church ; which is not peculiar to converted persons, but may, even in a scripture sense, be asserted of unconverted church members : it is being members of that body of which CHRIST is the head, viz. the church.

THIS, I think, is evident from Rom. xi. 17, 24. In which passage we find the members of the Jewish church represented as the branches of a good olive-tree ;—that some of these branches were broken off, and that because of unbelief ;—that the Gentiles, the natural branches of the wild olive-tree, were grafted in among the branches of the good olive-tree, and with them partook of its root and fatness ;—that it was by faith that the Gentiles enjoyed this privilege.

By the good olive-tree, I apprehend, is not meant the *person* of JESUS CHRIST, but his *church*, which is so called, Jer. xi. 16. *The LORD called thy name a green olive-tree, fair and of goodly fruit.* By being grafted into this olive-tree we are not to understand a saving union to CHRIST : for this we cannot assert without denying the saints perseverance ; because the same branches that had been united to this olive-tree were broken off : no, nor even if we do ; for they were broken off as a punishment inflicted *because* of unbelief : their unbelief was prior to their separation and the *procuring cause* of it ; but on supposition of non-perseverance, unbelief was not prior to it, but the *active agent* that necessarily produced the effect as soon as it existed ; it took place at the same instant of time with their unbelief, and did not follow as a consequence of it. By the fatness of the good olive-tree we are not to understand those saving graces, which are communicated from CHRIST to those who have a special union with him by faith ; but the various outward privileges of the church, that is, the special protection of Divine Providence, the lively oracles of truth, the means of grace and salvation, viz. a standing gospel ministry, the ordinances of divine institution, and we may add,

add, the same religious privileges for their offspring. These are the fatness of the olive-tree, the manure cast about its roots to render it fruitful. By faith is not meant that act of the soul, by which it receives CHRIST, is savingly united to him and made partaker of the divine nature ; but rather that general belief of the divinity of CHRIST, and of his being the true MESSIAH, which induced them to embrace Christianity as a divine institution. By unbelief we are not to understand the want of saving faith in CHRIST ; but the denying him to be the true MESSIAH, and refusing to submit to him in that character.

IT was for this unbelief that some of the Jews were unchurched, broken off from the good olive-tree, and deprived of its fatness ; while the believing Jews still remained members of the church of GOD, and in the enjoyment of its privileges, though under a different dispensation. The Gentiles believed in CHRIST, and submitted to him as their anointed Saviour ; and therefore were grafted among the believing Jews into the good olive-tree, and partook of the various privileges of GOD'S church, of which the unbelieving Jews had been deprived, because of their unbelief. Observe, the Gentiles were grafted into the *same* olive-tree, from which the Jews were broken off, and partook of the *same* root and fatness. The *same* church-privileges, which the Jews had enjoyed, the Gentiles now enjoy, with several advantageous additions.

BY the explanation I have given above of faith and unbelief, I do not mean to deny that the Gentiles had a saving faith, nor that the Jews were void of it, but to shew what was particularly intended by the Apostle.

THE relation to CHRIST, of which we are now treating, is in John xv. 2, styled being in him : *Every branch IN ME that beareth not fruit he taketh away.* Here are branches in CHRIST, that do not bear fruit. We cannot suppose that they are in him by a living principle of faith and love, for then they would certainly bring forth fruit : and united to CHRIST, in a saving way, they could not be, without such a principle ; and therefore it is some other kind of union that is intended. What can this be but that they were members of that mystical body of which CHRIST is the head, or it is evident that if we do not admit of this sense, we must allow of falling from saving grace : and even if we do allow of it, it will not much alter the matter, or help to avoid the difficulty ; for, as now

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hinted, none but a living faith, that works by love, unites the soul to CHRIST; and where the believer has true love to CHRIST, he will keep his commandments. Moreover, on the principle of non-perseverance, it could not properly be said that GOD taketh away the branch that beareth not fruit, but that he taketh himself away by his own unbelief and disobedience. But say, that by being in CHRIST, is meant being a member of his visible church, and that taking away signifies depriving of its privileges, and the sense is natural, easy and obvious.

I APPREHEND the same thing is represented in other words, in the parable of the barren fig-tree, Luke xiii. 6, 7, 8. The word *vineyard*, both in the old and new testament, is used to signify the church of GOD. *A fig-tree* planted in the vineyard then signifies a member of his church. The *barren fig-tree*, one who does not live a holy life, though long a member of the church, and in the enjoyment of its various privileges. For this fig-tree the dresser of the vineyard still intercedes, and pleads that it may be spared, until he shall dig about it and dung it; which, I think, plainly intimates it to be the mind of CHRIST, that graceless members of his church should be spared, and continued in it, until proper means be used to bring them to repentance and holiness of life. This digging and dunging represents the various means used, by divine appointment, for the conviction and conversion of graceless church-members.

FROM such passages as these, I conclude that the design of church-membership is not merely to edify and comfort the people of GOD; but that the church is intended as a kind of nursery, or school, in which others should be trained up for GOD, instructed in the doctrines of CHRIST, and favoured with the various means calculated to bring them to repentance. It is a society formed on purpose to bring its members, especially the young, to be saints, as well as to promote their spiritual interest after they become such; and therefore to deny children the privilege of church-membership is to frustrate one of the principal ends for which this important society was instituted; it is to bar them out of that school, where they ought to be trained up for the service and enjoyment of GOD in the higher regions of glory.

BUT perhaps some may object, and say, if this is the design of church-membership, why are any excluded? Why are not all

all admitted, who need correction? To which I reply, that should this be the case, the church would soon cease to be a nursery of religion or a school for teaching CHRIST's disciples. Those who will not submit to the rules of this society must be excluded, lest they corrupt, and make it no longer a church of CHRIST, but a synagogue of Satan. This society's being designed for the purposes above-mentioned is the precise reason, why unworthy members should be excluded. The end of public seminaries of learning is to train up youth in knowledge and virtue; but should all be admitted as scholars, who need such an education, however corrupt their principles or vicious their conduct, the seminary would soon cease to be a school of virtue, and degenerate into a mere sink of impiety and debauchery. Those then of abandoned characters must be excluded the Society, for the sake of the rest. However, young scholars are not to be excluded, but corrected, and those who are more advanced in life, if vicious and obstinate, are to be expelled the society.

3. I SHALL prove that the covenant made with Abraham, to which circumcision was annexed as a seal, was truly the covenant of grace.

HERE I shall not venture into the controversy about the propriety of the word covenant; whether the Greek term *διαθήκη* is rightly translated, or whether it is more proper to render it a testament, or to prefer the word dispensation to either of these. Much that has been advanced on this subject, I take to be a trifling debate about the use of a word. Either of these terms is safe, when explained agreeable to the analogy of faith; and without this, none of them will fully and properly express the idea.

IT is evident, that in sacred scripture, a gracious GOD has offered a pardon of sin to guilty men through the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and promised eternal life to all who return to him by true repentance, and accept of this offer with their whole hearts. When this offer is made to sinners, it is undoubtedly their indispensable duty, as well as greatest interest, sincerely to embrace it, and give themselves up to GOD as his faithful and devoted servants. This gracious promise lays the creature under additional obligations to his Maker and justly offended Sovereign. Where there are mutual engagements between GOD and man, the one bound by gracious promise, and the other by duty and gratitude, the scriptures authorize us to call  
this

this a covenant, however differently the word is used from its common signification, when applied to transactions among men.

THE grace of GOD manifested to mankind, has been variously dispensed to his church, in different periods. Before the time of Moses, the outward ordinances of religion, or ordinary means of grace, appear to have been few in number. From the time of Moses to the coming of CHRIST in the flesh, the grace of GOD was dispensed by a great variety of ordinances and outward ceremonies of worship; which were probably intended in part to allure the Israelites, then in a rude and uncultivated state, from the pompous worship of the idolatrous nations, which surrounded them; partly to excite in their minds pious and devout sentiments; and partly to typify CHRIST, and the peculiar blessings of the gospel-dispensation. From the ascension of CHRIST to the present day, this grace is dispensed in a more simple way, chiefly by the preaching of the word, and administration of baptism and the LORD'S supper.

THESE different dispensations of the grace of GOD, we are authorized by scripture to call different covenants. The dispensation enjoyed by the Israelites, before the coming of CHRIST, is in Heb. viii. 7—called the first covenant; but in the context we are informed that it is faulty; it did not exhibit the free grace of GOD with sufficient clearness and fullness; therefore CHRIST the Mediator introduced a better covenant, and administered it in a more excellent way, so as more fully and clearly to manifest the riches of divine grace and the method of man's recovery. Under the new dispensation, GOD promises to bestow more plentifully the graces of his HOLY SPIRIT, and an abundant increase of knowledge. Now because of the superior excellency of this covenant, the other gave place to it, waxed old, and vanished away.

THE Greek word *διαθήκη*, translated *covenant* in the eighth chapter, is rendered *testament* in the ninth. A testament is a man's last will, in which he bequeaths legacies to his children and friends.—JESUS CHRIST in his last will bequeaths the rich legacies of his grace, the purchase of his precious blood, to the children of GOD. But he did not insert in his will the particular names of the legatees; but left legacies to all, who in this life, should be brought, by the efficacious energy of his spirit, to embrace the gospel-offer, and by faith

insert

insert their own names in his last will. By the new testament of JESUS CHRIST then, we are to understand the last dispensation of GOD'S grace to mankind, which we enjoy under the gospel. I do not say that the word Διαταγή, as it is used in scripture, always signifies a dispensation of grace; but that it signifies this in the passages now referred to is, I think, sufficiently evident; and therefore the word covenant in those places in the old testament, to which they refer, must be used in the same sense.

THIS was the covenant of grace which was made with Abraham, or that Abraham was favoured with a dispensation of, and of which circumcision was a sign and seal.

WERE we to judge of this covenant, only by reading the writings of the old dispensations, there might remain some doubt, whether the blessings of it were carnal and temporal, or spiritual and eternal, or whether it was a covenant of works or a covenant of grace; but when we consider it in the light the new dispensation reflects upon it, it appears with sufficient evidence, that the principal blessings exhibited were spiritual and eternal. It is not peculiar to this old covenant that it included both temporal and spiritual blessings, the new also *both the promise of the life which now is and of that which is to come.* Under the old dispensation temporal blessings are most enlarged upon, and under the new those that are spiritual. This covenant or dispensation, whether termed new or old, or in whatever manner administered to mankind, includes all the external privileges of the church, the right and full enjoyment of which are the principal advantages of church-membership.

WE read of GOD'S entering into covenant with Abraham, Gen. xii. 12, 3, where he promises Abraham, *that in him all families of the earth should be blessed,* that is, that the MESSIAH, by whose mediation all nations should be blessed, should according to the flesh, descend from him. This the apostle Paul, Gal. iii. 8, calls preaching the gospel to Abraham; and gives us to understand that it implied the doctrine of justification by faith. This surely could not be a covenant of works, under which the gospel is preached, and in it a justifying righteousness held forth to guilty sinners. In Rom. iv. 11.—The Apostle treating on the same subject of justification by faith, in order to support and confirm the doctrine, introduces Abraham as an example of one who was justified by faith, in op-

position to works, and assures us that he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith, which he had yet being uncircumcised. The righteousness of faith, is the righteousness wrought out by the active and passive obedience of JESUS CHRIST, which is offered in the gospel for the justification of sinners, and received by faith. Now this is held forth no where but in the gospel, under a dispensation of grace. A carnal, legal, temporal covenant is an utter stranger to every thing of the kind ; it contains no such righteousness, nor offers any such blessings to mankind. It is true, a number of temporal blessings are promised, such as relate to the future prosperity of the descendants of Abraham in the land of Canaan : but we should remember that these are connected with the great promise of redemption through CHRIST, and constituted a part of GOD's gracious scheme for the salvation of the ends of the earth. They were connected with GOD's merciful design, as means are connected with the end ; and probably the want of a due attention to this has led many to imagine this covenant to be legal, temporal or carnal.

WHEN we duly consider what the Apostle says in the fore-cited passages, we must naturally, and, I think, necessarily, conclude, that he believed that the covenant made with Abraham, to which the sign of circumcision was annexed as a seal, was properly a covenant of grace, and not a mere legal temporal covenant : and can we presume better to understand the matter than the inspired Apostle ; or set up our own commentaries in opposition to his ?

4. I THINK it will appear on a careful and impartial examination, that circumcision and baptism were in substance the same ordinance ; that is, that they signified the same spiritual blessings ; and that the chief difference is in the external rite, and their being annexed to different dispensations of the grace of GOD.

THAT circumcision was a sign of initiation into the Jewish church, as far as I know, is disputed by none. It is also, I think, universally agreed, by all who hold with baptism at all, that it is a sign of initiation into the christian church.

IT has already been proved that circumcision was a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, and, as far as I know, it is generally allowed that baptism has the same use under the gospel-dispensation : at least, I should suppose, that this will  
not

not be denied by those who maintain that the ordinance ought not to be administered to any, except those who are savingly united to God in a special covenant-relation. Circumcision was also a sign of regeneration, or of purity of heart; and that this was one principal thing represented by baptism is universally acknowledged.

THUS it appears that these two ordinances were in substance the same; or that the principal and spiritual blessings they represented were the same.

IN order to put it out of dispute that circumcision was a sign of regeneration, let us consider a few passages of scripture. A vicious or sinful disposition of heart is called uncircumcision of heart, Lev. xxvi. 41, 42. *If then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity; then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember.* Jer. ix. 26. *For all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart.* Acts vii. 57. *Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost.* Holiness, or purity of heart, is called circumcision of heart, Deut. x. 16. *Circumcise therefore the fore-skin of your heart, and be no more stiff-necked.* Jer. iv. 4. *Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the fore-skins of your heart.* Phil. iii. 3. *For we are the circumcision which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in CHRIST JESUS, and have no confidence in the flesh.* Col. ii. 11, 12. *In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of CHRIST: buried with him in baptism.* If circumcision did not represent holiness of heart, or regeneration, I know not what sense or propriety there can be in these passages. Can they bear any other reasonable construction, or is not this the most natural and obvious? Why is impurity of heart called uncircumcision of heart, if circumcision did not represent a contrary disposition, or state of mind? What sense is there in saying, we are the circumcision who worship God in the spirit, if circumcision signified nothing that was spiritual, but only what was carnal or legal? Why is regeneration called circumcision made without hands in the 11th verse, and being buried with CHRIST in baptism in the 12th, if they had not been both signs of one and the same grace of regeneration? What is meant by the circum-

cision

cision of CHRIST, but the renovation of our nature, and why called circumcision, if circumcision did not represent it?

Now since circumcision and baptism were both a sign of admission into the visible church, a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, and a sign of regeneration, or the renewing of the Holy Ghost, I conclude, that they were in substance the same ordinance, that is, that they signified the same spiritual blessings; and that the chief difference is in the outward sign made use of, and their being annexed to different dispensations of GOD's grace.

IF circumcision and baptism were in substance the same ordinance, I think it will follow, as an easy, natural, and unavoidable consequence, that they ought to be administered to the same subjects; and that as the infants of the members of the Jewish church were received into that church by the rite of circumcision, so the infants of christian parents ought to be received into the christian church, together with themselves, by the rite of baptism. If it was a real advantage to the children of the Jews to be admitted into the Jewish church, it must be an advantage as real, and certainly as great, for the children of christians to be admitted into the christian church. If it would have been a real disadvantage to the Jewish church to have been deprived of this privilege, so it is a real disadvantage to the christian church. If there was once a divine warrant for receiving children into the church of GOD, and that has never been repealed or revoked, there is still a divine warrant for it.

BUT perhaps it may be objected to what has been advanced above, that though circumcision was a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith to Abraham, yet to his infant offspring it sealed only temporal blessings: it signified one thing when administered to him, and quite another when administered to his posterity. In answer to this I would observe, that it would be a very bold attempt to alter the form, or change the nature of the covenant of GOD; or to make two, where he has only made one. To me it appears, that if the principal and most important things sealed to Abraham, were quite different from those sealed to his posterity; if the one was spiritual and eternal, and the other carnal and temporal, there was not one only, but two distinct covenants, sealed by circumcision.

**BUT** how could circumcision seal the righteousness of faith to children, who are incapable of acting faith? Is not this putting a seal to a blank? As we use the word covenant, when treating on this subject, in a sense different from its meaning when applied to human transactions, the word seal also must have a different signification. The significancy of a seal, must answer to, and be determined by, the meaning of what is sealed; this is first declared in words or in writing, and the seal declares nothing more; but is only a confirmation of what is thus declared: now what this is I have endeavoured to explain in the preceding part of this section.

**THE** seal is annexed, by divine appointment, to the dispensation of grace as a mean of exciting faith, as well as strengthening it: and the use of it, neither to children nor grown persons, is confined to the time of administration; but is intended for their use and improvement in the after periods of life.

**WHEN** we say, that children were under the old dispensation, and are still under the new, in covenant with GOD, we mean by it, that they had formerly, and still have a right to the privilege of church-membership, according to scripture, and to all the outward advantages of the dispensation of GOD's grace, as far, and as soon, as they are capable of improving them. They have the offers of salvation handed down to them with GOD's seal annexed thereto, to give them the earliest encouragement to repentance, and the strongest assurance of acceptance, when they do repent: and being members of the church, they are more under the special protection of a kind Providence, than those who are aliens and strangers to the commonwealth of Israel. When we read that the promise is made to believers and their seed, we understand by it, that GOD has made the offer of life to them and their children; and promises to confer it, on condition of repentance and faith. The offer and conditional promise is made to children as an expression of GOD's goodness to them, in order to encourage and excite them to return to him in their early days: and when the sign of the covenant is annexed to this gracious promise, and administered to them in baptism, it is a fuller expression of the Divine Goodness, and a stronger motive and encouragement to return to GOD through CHRIST. The blessing promised is not conferred on such children as are guilty of actual sin, until they actually repent and accept the offer;

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yet they are encouraged to accept of it by the promise of GOD made to them, and given under his hand and seal.

By children's being in covenant then, together with their parents, we do not mean that they certainly have that saving union to CHRIST, which true believers have. It would appear very unscriptural to assert, that when a parent believes the promise made to him and his children, and is justified by his faith, that his children are justified by *his* faith also. If this was the case, then all the descendants of a justified person, from generation to generation, would be justified; *and him whom he justifieth he also glorificeth*; and thus heaven would be secured more surely by inheritance than our estates. Yet we suppose, nay we venture to affirm, that the faith and piety of the parents are so far imputed to their children, as that on their account, they enjoy the various outward advantages of the dispensation of the covenant of grace.

THE objectors here are involved in the same difficulties with us; for if the covenant of circumcision was properly a covenant of works, there were certain conditions to be assented to and complied with, which children were as truly incapable of, at the time of their circumcision, as they are now of assenting to the covenant of grace and exercising faith and repentance. They allow that this covenant "referred to morality, the civil polity of the Jews, and to the outward rites and ordinances of worship;" and that a compliance with these were the conditions thereof. If circumcision was a seal of these things, why administered to infants, who were incapable of believing them to be of divine authority, and expressing their assent to such requisitions of Heaven? May not the question be justly retorted, *Was not this setting a seal to a blank?* Was it true morality that was required; or was it that which was false and hypocritical? Was it a sincere and spiritual observance of the rites and ordinances of worship; or was it only an external worship that was required, which included not the exercise of love to GOD, or any of the graces of his SPIRIT? If it was true morality, and a sincere observance of the rites and ordinances of worship, how were infants capable of these, more than of faith and repentance? Was it indeed true that the covenant of circumcision was such, that all the conditions of it might be complied with by unregenerated men, and by the greatest hypocrites; and the blessings claimed, on the footing of the covenant, as a reward, or in consequence, of such hypocritical services? Was it  
false

false morality and hypocritical worship, that was required, and sufficient to entitle the Jews to the blessings of the covenant? Even on this very absurd supposition, infants were no more capable of assenting to the conditions, than they are of embracing the gospel: and if there is an absurdity in administering baptism to infants, arising either from their natural or moral incapacity, there was the same absurdity in circumcising them. and if we must understand the dispensation, to which circumcision was annexed, to be a covenant in *strict propriety*, I think, the absurdity will appear much greater; because we understand nothing more by the covenant sealed by baptism than a dispensation of grace.

BUT that it was the mind of CHRIST that children should be received into the visible church may be farther argued from Mark x. 13, 14, *and they brought young children to him, that he should touch them; and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when JESUS saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of GOD.* This expression *Kingdom of GOD*, or *Kingdom of heaven*, is most commonly used in the new testament, to signify the church of CHRIST on earth: and I see nothing in the connexion, or occasion on which they are here used, to induce us to believe that they are not to be taken in this most common sense in this passage; and then it gives us this plain sentence, *Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not*; for such are members of my gospel church. This sense will be fixed and established, if we consider that to maintain that the *Kingdom of GOD* here signifies a state of glory, will amount either to a total denial of original sin, or an assertion that all children are freed from it, purified by divine grace and fitted for the kingdom of glory. To say that it denies original sin, is to make it contradict other plain passages of the written word; and to say that it asserts that children are pardoned, sanctified, and fitted for glory, would imply a denial of the saints perseverance, which is a doctrine contained in scripture, and generally held by the reformed protestant churches. Take the words then, I say, as they are most frequently used, and in this their fixed meaning, and they are a plain declaration of CHRIST, that children are members of his church, now under the gospel, as they were before his coming in the flesh. Shall we then either carelessly or presumptuously, exclude and refuse them the initiating sign? Shall we refuse to devote them to GOD in baptism, and bring them

them up for him ? Are they not his disciples, or scholars in his school, and shall we not there train them up for his service ?

. It may possibly be objected to the use I have made of the last-mentioned passage or scripture, That the meaning of the expression *of such is the kingdom of heaven*, is, that such bear a resemblance to GOD's children, and that not in their moral, but natural dispositions ; and that CHRIST designed, from the natural dispositions of little children, to represent what ought to be the moral dispositions of the children of grace. But his putting his hands upon them, and blessing them, plainly shows that something more than this was intended. Indeed had this been all, he might have said, perhaps with equal propriety, suffer *sheep* to come unto me, and forbid them not ; for of such is the kingdom of heaven. An expression that would have sounded extremely odd, though the saints are frequently compared to sheep, in scripture, as well as to children.

THE expression, I Cor. vii. 14. *Else were your children unclean, but now are they holy*, has often been produced as a proof of infant baptism : and it appears to be sound and rational, after all the attempts that have been made to prove that *unclean* signifies illegitimate, or not lawfully begotten, and *holy* legitimate, or lawfully begotten ; for this construction entirely destroys the force of the Apostle's reasoning, and reduces it to a pitiful meanness. It is proving the point by a medium that must necessarily be as doubtful as the thing to be proved. It was impossible that the legitimacy of the Corinthians' children could be more certain than the lawfulness of their cohabitation ; and unless it was, it could never be produced as a proof of it. But if we suppose it a received maxim in their church, that the children of christians were relatively holy, as being consecrated to the service of GOD, we take the word in a scriptural sense, and the Apostle's reasoning has its full force.

I KNOW it is objected to the arguments produced in favour of infant-baptism, that repentance and faith are required in scripture as the conditions of baptism, and children are not capable of these. To which I reply ; though repentance and faith are certainly necessary for the scriptural improvement of baptism and all other gospel ordinances, it does not follow that they are essential qualifications for the reception of this or

any other. If they were, they ought not to be received by any who have not absolute assurance; for they can have no greater certainty of their validity, than of their own gracious estate; whenever they doubt of the latter, they must of the former; and therefore must act with a doubting conscience: and in such cases, *he that doubteth is damned*. It would be farther necessary that the Administrator should have the same absolute certainty of the gracious estate of all the subjects, to whom he administers these ordinances; because if he doubts of this, he must doubt of the lawfulness of his own administrations. This absolute certainty would be peculiarly necessary as to baptism. If repentance and faith are essential, then without them the administration is null and void, the church can have no certain knowledge of its own members, and, in many instances, individuals will have no certainty of their own baptism. From scripture examples, all Adults who are baptized should be exhorted to repentance and faith, and should profess to believe with all the heart, *i. e.* with sincerity; but even Simon Magus, though after his baptism, he appeared to be *in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity*, was not exhorted to be rebaptized.

If circumcision was a seal of the covenant of grace, and a sign of spiritual blessings, as it undoubtedly was in the judgment of the Apostle Paul, the same objection lay against circumcising children; but we are sure that in this case it was not sufficient, because they were circumcised by divine command; and therefore may conclude that it is not sufficient in the case of baptism. Abraham had faith, yet being uncircumcised, and, I judge, it was as necessary in order to his circumcision, as it is in adult persons now, in order to their baptism: but as faith in his infant offspring was not required in order to their circumcision, neither is it necessary in the children of believers, in order to their baptism; and there is equal reason for baptizing the latter, as there was for circumcising the former. Faith and repentance being required of adults, does not exclude infants. If Abraham had been in unbelief he could not, with any propriety, have received the seal of the righteousness of faith; but his infant offspring might and did receive it, without any such absurdity. The exhortations to repent and be baptized are made to adults in a state of infidelity. No argument can therefore be drawn from this against baptizing the children of believers. The contrary rather appears from Acts ii. 38, 39.—*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of JESUS CHRIST for the remission*

*tion of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you and to your children, &c.* Though Abraham's children were not capable of actively receiving the righteousness of faith, they were capable of being received into the church by the sign of circumcision, where the righteousness of faith was held forth, with GOD's confirming seal annexed; they were capable of being taken under the special protection of Divine Providence; and as their minds opened, they were capable, through divine grace, of receiving saving benefits from the means of instruction. Children may be laid under great obligations to their parents, by kindnesses done them before they are capable of understanding what is done, or the reasons of it: these may afterwards affect them with gratitude and engage them to a dutiful behaviour. So the kindness of GOD to children, in blessing them with christian parents, who early dedicated them to him, and were careful of their religious education, may be the means of exciting sentiments of gratitude, and engaging them to devote themselves to the service of GOD through CHRIST. The Apostle when treating on the great doctrine of justification in the sight of GOD, Rom. iii. 1, 2, says, *What advantage then hath the Jew, and what profit is there of circumcision?* He does not answer, as some would in a similar case, that circumcision was no advantage to the Jews, because administered to them in infancy, when they could not make any use of it; but *much every way: chiefly because that unto them were committed the oracles of GOD*, containing a dispensation of the covenant of grace confirmed to them by the seal of heaven. The same reply is abundantly sufficient to this objection against baptizing infants.

INFANT-BAPTISM is represented by some as one of the gross corruptions of the church of Rome, and even a main pillar of Popery. Was the ordinance first supposed to have a saving virtue communicated to it, and esteemed essential to salvation, and then administered to infants; or was it not thus corrupted and abused, and then, through ignorance of its nature and use, infant baptism disputed and rejected: because placed in the room of regenerating grace? It is not unreasonable to suppose the latter was the case, and some ancient writers strongly confirm it.

BUT it will be said, If it was the mind of CHRIST that children should be received into the church by baptism, why has he not declared it in express words! Should I answer, that

that it was because he knew that some would corrupt and abuse it, and designed that others should oppose it, as a means of recovering them from these errors, perhaps it might be thought rather too curious. I would therefore observe, that we find where strong prejudices take place, even the most express terms are not sufficient to decide such points. Nothing need be more clearly expressed, than that baptism and the LORD's supper are ordinances of the gospel ; and yet both are positively denied by the Quakers. I would farther observe, that we find in scripture, that those things which relate to the externals of religion are much more sparingly, and often much more obscurely, represented, than those which are more essential and important ; because a mistake in them is far less dangerous.

HOWEVER, let us recollect, that all along, from Abraham's time to the coming of CHRIST, children had been received into the church by the initiating sign, which was a seal of the righteousness of faith ; that christians were grafted into the same olive-tree among them, and made partakers of the same fatness ; that the same promise which was made to Abraham and his seed, is made to christians and their seed ; that circumcision and baptism were substantially the same ordinance ; and that CHRIST has said, *Suffer little children and forbid them not to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven* ; and then say, is not this proof sufficient to satisfy any person, in a point not essential to salvation ? Especially when we add, that the privilege of church-membership, formerly granted to children by a gracious GOD, has never since been repealed or taken away. Can we suppose, without any intimation of any such thing in scripture, that CHRIST came to cast a considerable part of the human race out of his church, which had been before received into it by divine command ? If an express command is necessary in this case, it is for keeping children out of the church, and not for receiving them into it : for this we have an express command, which has never been repealed ; and if a law is not to be found repealing this privilege once granted to the church, is not CHRIST much displeased with those, though they be his disciples, who deny children under the gospel this their ancient right ?

I BELIEVE there is a goodly number of reputable citizens in the land, of various denominations : and if all would receive the rising generation into their respective religious societies, and be serious and diligent in teaching them the principles

cipling of the christian religion, and training them up in the fear of GOD, we should have a much more pleasing prospect of the future prosperity of the church of CHRIST.

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### S E C T. III.

**I** SHALL now proceed, in the third place, to shew, what are the advantages of baptism to children.

IN order to understand what advantage baptism is to little children, let us recur to what was before observed, viz. That baptism is of advantage, not from any innate power, any saving virtue communicated to it by the words of consecration, or any inseparable connexion between it and the grace of GOD represented by it; but only considered as one of the means of grace appointed by our LORD; and that the means of grace produce their effect, through the divine blessing, by their natural tendency to communicate and spread the knowledge of religion, and impress the mind with a sense of its importance; and that when GOD blesses the means, he causes them to produce that effect, to which they naturally tend.

Now when parents present their children to GOD in baptism, it is proper and natural, and their undoubted duty to recollect the sacred obligations they are under to bring them up for him, and solemnly to profess their resolutions to perform this important duty. This solemn act has a natural tendency deeply to impress their hearts with a lively sense of their obligations, and their minds being thus impressed, they will be more diligent, faithful and conscientious in the performance of this duty. Now it is evidently a great advantage to children to have their parents thus engaged to *bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the LORD.*

CHILDREN by baptism are solemnly acknowledged to be members of the visible church; they are the seed from which, in an ordinary way, the future church of CHRIST must spring; they are taken under its care, entitled, as members, to its prayers, instructions and christian discipline. It is certainly a great advantage to a rising generation to have not only their natural parents bound to bring them up in the christian religion and in the fear of GOD, but the church also bound to see that parents be careful in performing this duty of love.

HERE we observe that as it is through the parents that children have a right to baptism, so it is through their instrumentality that they receive the benefits of it. The parents then must themselves be regular members of the church, and subject to its discipline. They may be considered as officers of the church, whose duty it is to train up their own children and domesticks for CHRIST, considered as members of his mystical body. The church as a society, have a right to see to it that the several members perform their respective religious and moral duties; and therefore that parents perform their duty to such of its members as are under their immediate care, that they give them proper instructions, set a christian example before them, and by their authority restrain them from open vice. If parents live in the omission of this duty, the church not only have a right, but are in duty bound, to admonish, rebuke and censure them for their criminal neglect. It is incumbent on church-officers, as far as they have opportunity, to see that parents are not negligent in this matter, and to assist them in instructing and governing their children: yea every adult member is bound to contribute his part, according to his ability and opportunity, to forward this good work; and are not these means excellently suited to keep up a serious sense of religion in the minds of men, and hand down the knowledge of it from generation to generation; and thus to answer the proper end of this and every other gospel-ordinance? Has not the baptism of children in fact been blessed as the means of keeping up a sense of this duty in the church, where it has been administered with due solemnity? I am fully persuaded it has. Has not this in fact been a happy mean of handing down the knowledge of religion to the present day? Has it not been the occasion of bringing many young persons to embrace real religion, and devote themselves to the service of GOD in their early days? Many instances of this, I presume, have been known: instances, where the consideration of their being devoted to GOD by pious parents has made deep impressions on the minds of children, and excited and encouraged them earnestly to seek after the GOD of their fathers. Why then should we reject an ordinance which has in so many instances been blessed? Reject it perhaps chiefly, because it has been greatly corrupted and abused by vicious parents, or by careless, graceless, or mistaken church-officers,

BUT here it may be said, these are important ends, it is true; but may they not be answered without baptism? I do not deny that they may, when a sovereign GOD, in his infinite wisdom, shall see fit to order it. The ends of the LORD'S

supper also might be answered, without the administration of that ordinance ; shall we therefore reject it as useless ? GOD might, if he saw cause, work altogether without means ; but shall we therefore neglect all the means he has appointed ? When we are considering the means of grace, we are not to inquire whether the end could be accomplished by any other means, but whether these means are well calculated for the purpose.

As far as my observation extends, it is generally found, that those parents who deny, or neglect, infant baptism, do also generally neglect the religious education of their children ; and some actually maintain, that it is a useless or pernicious thing, directly contrary to the plain and repeated command of GOD. One great reason, I suspect, of this surprising mistake, and the consequent neglect of this important duty, is that the means appointed, or warranted, for keeping up a due sense of it on the minds of parents, are either wholly neglected, or improperly used.

EXCLUDING children from the church, esteeming them as heathen, and teaching them to look upon themselves as such, together with the consequent neglect of their souls, will probably have a very pernicious influence on the future interest of christianity. The natural and destructive tendency of this will not so fully appear, as long as there is any good degree of the life and power of religion among those who deny children this privilege. But in my opinion, it lays a foundation for banishing the form of religion from among men, whenever the power of it has departed ; and then there are no means of reviving it left. The form of religion is GOD's ordinary means of reviving and promoting it in the world. In the dark ages of Popery the form of religion, corrupt and erroneous as it was, was of great use, as it happily retained the knowledge of christianity, prevented a total return to heathenism, and thus preserved that light, which shined forth at the reformation.—The same happy effect the form of religion has produced in some protestant countries, when the power of it had dwindled away. The form of Godliness seems as necessary to the power of it, as the human body is to the existence of the soul, in the present state. Without the soul, the body is a lifeless, loathsome carcase ; and yet destroy the body, and the soul is dismissed from this world.—So the form of Godliness, without the power, is quite unprofitable in one respect, and yet in another it is highly necessary to the very existence of religion here below ; and when the power and form are both  
banished

banished, we are inevitably overspread with heathen darkness. In a state of general deadness, will not excluding children from the church, teaching them to believe that they have no interest in it, and are to be looked upon in the same light with the children of heathen, naturally lead them entirely to neglect all the affairs of the church, and even the very forms of worship? Will it not as naturally lead them into heathenish practices, as robbing a young woman of the reputation of chastity would lead her into lascivious practices? A regard to reputation is a strong fence against vice, and support to virtue, so useful and necessary to mankind, that it ought by all proper means to be preserved and encouraged. Whenever the interest of the church and forms of religious worship are neglected, a state of heathen darkness immediately succeeds; and christianity is banished from the earth. This appears to me to be the very unhappy and natural tendency of excluding children from the church of CHRIST; let us therefore suffer them to come into a church-state, and forbid them not, *for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*

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#### S E C T. IV.

**W**E profess to devote our children to God in baptism, and consecrate them to his service; it is proper we should inquire into the meaning of this, and in what manner this important duty ought to be performed.

IT is not the outward act of bringing our children in our arms and presenting them to a minister to have them baptized, that is the thing intended. This we may do, while in reality we devote them to the world, the flesh and the devil. But it means that we heartily consent and sincerely desire, that our children should be the LORD'S, devoted to his service and disposed to his glory; that with humble trust we commit them into the arms of divine mercy; and honestly resolve to train them up in the knowledge and fear of their Maker. This is the principal, the most substantial and important part of what is required, and what we profess to do, on the solemn occasion; and unless we do this, our performance is essentially deficient, and our profession quite different from the meaning of our hearts; because the chief and most excellent part of the duty is wanting, that is, a proper disposition of mind. We should never comfort ourselves with the apprehension that we have done our duty, when we have only made the profession and

performed the outward act ; for in this case, we are so far from having reason to imagine that our duty is done, that we have all reason to conclude our profession to be false and hypocritical, and therefore injurious to ourselves and dishonouring to GOD. In every act of worship, and in every religious duty, the great demand of the ALMIGHTY is, *My son, give me thine heart.*

IN order then to our performing this duty in an acceptable manner it is necessary that we be sincere christians ; that we be deeply convinced of sin, in its evil nature and tendency ; humbled under a sense of the absolute insufficiency of our own righteousness for justification before GOD, and of the greatness of our guilt and unworthiness of the divine mercy ; that with hearts truly penitent we renounce every sin and embrace the LORD JESUS as our Saviour, trusting entirely in his merits ; and that our hearts be warmed and animated with sincere love to GOD and supreme delight in his service. For if we do not unfeignedly devote ourselves to GOD, we shall not, we cannot, sincerely devote our children to him ; if we do not trust in the divine mercy ourselves, we do not truly look to it, and depend on it, for our children ; and if we do not ourselves resolve to live a life of holiness, we cannot sincerely purpose to bring up our children in the practice of virtue and piety. It is abundantly evident, that if we withhold our own hearts from GOD, and devote ourselves to the service of the world and the devil, we withhold from him our children and all we possess.

WHEN we present our children then to GOD in the ordinance of baptism, we in that act professedly renounce all sin, take the LORD JESUS to be our Redeemer, GOD the father to be our father, and the HOLY GHOST to be our sanctifier ; and at the same time give ourselves up to be devoted to the service of the adorable Trinity. This then is a very solemn and important act : equal perhaps in solemnity to an attendance on the ordinance of the LORD's supper ; it ought therefore to be engaged in with diligent and solemn preparation of soul, and with humble and earnest prayer to Almighty GOD for his gracious presence and blessing.

HENCE it evidently appears that parents ought to have a competent knowledge of the doctrines and duties of the christian religion, and particularly of the fallen state of man, the way of his recovery made known in the gospel, and of the nature and use of the ordinance, in order to their attendance upon it in a rational and acceptable manner, such as shall re-  
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dound to the honour of GOD, and the edification and comfort of their own souls : and I may add, that without this knowledge, they are evidently unqualified for teaching their children the principles of the christian religion, and thereby fulfilling the solemn engagements they are under. In this state of ignorance they are very unfit to be trusted with the education of the members of CHRIST'S church. Such persons perform a blind or presumptuous service ; they ignorantly or wilfully profane the sacred institution of the Redeemer.

SUCH parents as neglect family worship and the religious education of their children, or are openly immoral, are evidently unqualified for the very important work of training up children for GOD. By their conduct they declare their want of love to CHRIST, and enmity to his ways ; and can an enemy be entrusted with this important work of duty and love, without the most evident absurdity ?

IT may be asked, why may not the church perform this duty to children, and they thus receive the benefits of church-membership, though their parents be ignorant, immoral and negligent ? To which I answer, that the GOD of nature has committed children to the disposal, and subjected them to the command, of their parents, and the church has no access to them in any other way than by their means. No man can with any consistency, be sponsor for a child, except he has the child at his own disposal, and also the property of the parent ; unless his circumstances will admit of his educating the child at his own expence. It would be absurd for a church to undertake to do that which a vicious parent may probably put entirely out of their power. It is by their authority over the parents, considered as members of the same religious society, that they are to promote the spiritual edification of children.

SHOULD any parents, who have had children baptized in this unqualified state, be afterwards convinced that they had done it in a sinful manner and not agreeable to the mind of CHRIST, they ought deeply to repent, not of what they have done, but of the sinful manner of their doing it, and do that now in sincerity and integrity of heart, which they did formerly only in outward show and profession ; that is, dedicate their children to GOD, and resolve to bring them up for him. The administration of gospel-ordinances is a transient act ; but the improvement may be more permanent, and is not confined to any particular moment. Or, if there are any who have  
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been presented to baptism in their infancy by careless, ignorant or irreligious parents or sponsors, and afterwards have been made sensible of the importance of religion and truly embraced it, they ought not to conclude their baptism to be invalid ; but to do what was signified by the outward action of their baptism ; that is, devote themselves to GOD, through JESUS CHRIST, according to the tenor of the new covenant.

IF baptism is always invalid, unless the person baptized is a true believer, he must have the actual exercise of faith at the moment of his baptism : for faith does not render baptism valid, when it is out of exercise, but when in exercise, whenever it does it at all. If it is not necessary, in order to the validity of the ordinance, that faith be in actual exercise at the moment of administration, I cannot see why a prior act should render it valid more than a posterior act : and if neither a prior nor posterior, but only a present act, is sufficient, no man can be sure that his baptism is valid, unless he is sure that he was acting faith the moment he was baptized : which is a rule that would probably render the baptism of most christians on earth doubtful.

IF baptism itself, or the manner of administering or receiving it, were essential to salvation, or to the real comfort of a christian, the greatest exactness in every thing relating to it would be absolutely necessary. But since this is not the case, since it is only an external rite signifying what is internal and spiritual, these particular circumstances are of less importance ; our chief concern should be to obtain the thing signified.

IT often gives me great uneasiness, to see persons, but newly engaged in religion, and not well established either in knowledge or grace, filled with vast anxiety about baptism, as if they esteemed it one of the most essential matters in religion. There is reason to fear that their perplexity on a subject of this nature will divert their attention from matters much more important and interesting, and thereby essentially injure their precious souls.

IT may be inquired here, whether it is the duty of unconverted parents to have their children baptized ? To which I would answer, yes ; it undoubtedly is. As GOD has given them children, he has made it their duty to dedicate them to him, and train them up for his service ; and they greatly sin, if they neglect this duty. But then they should observe, that they must do it in that manner which GOD requires. The  
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manner is of much greater importance than the matter; being essentially necessary to the right performance of the duty. It is their duty; but it must be performed in the exercise of faith and of love to GOD and his service. Unless it is done in this way it is no true act of obedience, and therefore a sin. Such persons then are in this unhappy dilemma, that if they neglect this duty, they sin; and if they perform it, without the exercise of that grace which they are not possessed of, they sin; and there is no possibility of their getting out of this dilemma, and doing what is right, but by immediately repenting and turning to GOD through CHRIST. It may be said that they ought to forbear until they obtain true grace; but then it should be remembered, that GOD does not allow them a moment's time to live without grace.

LET it be observed, that I am saying nothing about what the church ought to make the ground of admission to its privileges. I am only treating of this subject as it concerns the consciences of those who approach GOD in this ordinance. Though we judge not the hearts of men, and ought by no means to attempt it; yet we are in duty bound to assist them in judging their own hearts, and to suggest to them proper motives to diligence and faithfulness herein.

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## S E C T. V.

**W**E shall inquire into the scriptural mode of administering the ordinance of baptism.

WITH regard to the mode of baptism, I frankly acknowledge, that I do not believe it to be any where precisely fixed in sacred scripture: but suppose it to be left to the direction of the churches, to use what mode they think most proper; and that the Apostles sometimes baptized by immersion, and sometimes by sprinkling. I therefore esteem a debate about the mode to be but trifling. What I shall say then upon this subject, shall be rather to shew that men need not perplex their minds about it, than to establish any one particular mode. Though I practise sprinkling myself, I have, on my own account, no scruple of conscience to baptize any person by immersion, who should choose it.

SEVERAL passages of scripture are frequently introduced in favour of immersion, which on a careful examination are found insufficient to establish it as the only mode. One is in Acts

viii. 38, 39. Where it is said, *They both went down into the water,—and came up out of the water.* The words are, *Εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ* and *ἐκ τοῦ ὕδατος*. *Εἰς* and *ἐκ* are such little words as, in all languages, have a variety of significations, and are to be understood from the occasion on which they are used, or the connexion in which they stand. *Εἰς* signifies *into, in, to, at, or upon*. *Εκ* signifies *out, out of, or from*. So that this passage may be properly rendered, they both went down *to* the water, and came up *from* the water, as well as, they both went down *into* the water, and came up *out of* the water. Also Mat. iii. 16. *And Jesus when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water.* *Ἀπο τοῦ ὕδατος*; here rendered *out of* the water, properly signifies *from* the water; and I know not by what authority our translators rendered it *out of*. *Εἰς τὸν Ἰορδάνην* Mark i. 9, may be properly translated *at Jordan*. The preposition *ἐν* Mat. iii. 6, may be translated *at* or *by* as well as *in*. So that none of these passages are sufficient to establish immersion as the only mode, though it appears probable that it was used, at least in some of these instances. It is said, John iii. 23. That *John was baptizing in Enon near to Salem, ὅτι ὑδάτι πολλὰ ἦν ἐκεῖ, because there was much water there.* It is not absolutely certain, whether this text means a large collection of water, which was used for the purpose of baptizing, or several small streams of water, used for the refreshment of the multitudes that probably attended on the occasion; because the word *πολλὰ* properly signifies *many*. However, as the *sound of many waters* is put for the roaring of the sea, which is a very large collection, it appears most probable to me, that the *much water* was used for the purpose of baptizing; though it does not appear to amount to an absolute certainty. The expression *buried with CHRIST in baptism*, Col. ii. 12, is often produced as a proof of immersion. If it was certain that the word *buried* referred to the outward sign made use of, I think it would decide the matter in favour of immersion beyond all reasonable contradiction; but if it refers to the thing signified, the proof fails. Baptism is an outward sign of a death unto sin; and this death is recommended and enforced from the consideration of the death and burial of CHRIST. Now the expression under consideration may refer to this, which is signified by baptism, and not to the outward sign. We have in John iii. 5, the expression *born of water*, which undoubtedly refers to baptism, and is similar to that mentioned above. But if we suppose this refers to the mode of baptism, and not the thing represented by it, we shall be under a necessity to find out a natural resemblance between the mode of baptism and the manner of a child's being born into the world, which perhaps might prove a difficult undertaking. In these positive institutions of the  
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gospel the elements seem to owe their significancy rather to divine institution, than to any thing in their nature, or the manner of using them.

THE question, *Can any man forbid water that these should not be baptized, who have received the HOLY-GHOST as well as we*, Acts x. 47, seems most naturally to convey the idea that the water to be used was not in a lake or river, that was open and free to all, but to be brought by some person in a vessel. The expression, no doubt, is figurative, and signifies, who can offer any reasonable objection against their being baptized? Yet the figure supposes the water to be private property. In this instance it is most probable, though not absolutely certain, that the act of baptizing was performed by pouring or sprinkling. It is not likely that the multitudes baptized in one day at Jerusalem, Acts ii. 41, were baptized by immersion. When they assembled, in the morning, it does not appear that they had any thought of being baptized that day; they could not therefore be provided with the necessary change of raiment; and it is not probable, that after their baptism, they scattered through the streets with their wet clothes on, and went dripping to their several habitations in the town or country.

As the water used for baptism is only an outward sign, the quantity is as immaterial as the quantity of bread and wine in the LORD's supper. In that instance a small bit of bread and a sip of wine are by all parties considered as sufficient as a full meal or supper, which it must be acknowledged was the principal meal of the day amongst the ancient eastern people.

IN the accounts we have in the new testament of persons baptized, where the place and other circumstances appear convenient for immersion, the expressions seem to favour that mode; but where they are not, no such expressions are used, and it is most natural to conclude that they were baptized by pouring or sprinkling. Hence I conclude that CHRIST designedly left it to the discretion of the churches to use either mode indifferently, and that the debate about it is trifling. I apprehend the zeal discovered on this head by the contending parties is not according knowledge; and that the exercise of charity would be much more pleasing to the Redeemer, than either this or that mode of dispensing the ordinance. We are apt to place religion much more in external forms, and think much more highly of them, than that GOD who is a spirit, and who requires us to *worship him in spirit and in truth*. However, where the forms of worship are plainly pointed out in the word, we ought conscientiously

conscientiously and strictly to adhere to them; but this is not the case, in the instance before us.

THE gospel dispensation was not designed for one particular nation only, or its ordinances to be administered in one particular place, as was the case with the old dispensation; but it was intended to be universal; to extend to every part of the world, to those in every climate, and of different constitutions, education and customs. What might be convenient, or decent, in one part of the world, would not in another, where climate or customs are quite different. What might be convenient in a warm southern climate, where the people generally go half naked, might be far otherwise in a northern climate, where, in the cold season, necessity requires that they should be well clothed. What, for instance, might be very decent in Africa, or the southern parts of Asia, would be far otherwise in the northern, more cultivated and refined parts of Europe. We are directed in 1 Cor. xiv. 40, to observe the rules of decency in every part of religious worship. The Apostle says, 1 Cor. xi. 14. *Doth not even nature itself teach you, that if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? Why so? Did not nature give long hair? And does nature teach him, that it is a shame to wear what nature gave? The answer is obvious. Custom had made it indecent, as it was a distinguishing mark of the other sex; and nature taught them to avoid that indecency. So nature may, in the same way, teach us that it is a shame to dress a woman in a thin habit, immerse her in water in the face of a large promiscuous assembly, and dismiss her with her clothes cleaving to her body so as to discover her shapes. I shall say but little of dipping in water in a cold season: perhaps the objections made against this by delicate persons as dangerous to health, arise chiefly from their ignorance of the natural effects of a cold bath. Yet it must be acknowledged that in the last stages of a consumption, and at certain periods of several other disorders, to immerse the patient in cold water will be fatal: and can we suppose that under the gentle administration of the gospel, a mode of administration should be essential to this ordinance, which would endanger the life of the subject? And I do not know that we have any reason to expect a miracle to prevent this natural effect.*

## CONCLUDING ADDRESSES.

TO MINISTERS, TO RULING ELDERS, TO PARENTS, and  
TO CHILDREN.

### I. TO the MINISTERS of the GOSPEL.

*Reverend and dear Brethren,*

**T**HOUGH I feel the greatest deference and respect for you, and esteem the most of you as far my superiors; yet on this occasion I would address you with that seriousness and painness, that becomes the nature and importance of the subject.

It is a common complaint among us, that true religion is in a very declining state: that instances of solemn concern about eternal things, of conviction and conversion to GOD, are exceedingly rare; that the people of GOD have lost their first love, their life and vigour in the ways of holiness, and are in a languishing dying state; that infidelity and profanity greatly abound; and that folly and vice stalk through the land with gigantic strides. Is not this greatly owing to the neglect and unfaithfulness of gospel-ministers? And will it not be charged against us, in the day of final accounts?

WHILE I recollect, and endeavour to have a deep sense of it impressed on my own heart, let me remind you of the importance of your charge.

THE command of your Divine Master to you is, *Feed my Lambs*: which no doubt, includes children in years, as well as children in grace. How much does the prosperity of the church, the present and future happiness of mankind, and the glory of GOD on earth, depend upon the faithful discharge of the important trust reposed in you with regard to the rising generation! What pernicious consequences, both to you and them, may, yea, certainly will, follow unfaithfulness and negligence!

You maintain that children have a right to the privilege of church-membership; and accordingly, as door-keepers in the house of GOD, you publickly and solemnly receive them into it. But do you suitably exert your abilities and influence to train them up in the knowledge and practice of religion? Are you conscientious and diligent in the performance of this duty, as far

far as you have opportunity, and with the other officers of the church, careful to see that parents *bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the LORD*? Children are under the government of the church; but are suitable endeavours used to restrain them from vice, and from those various follies of youth, that are inconsistent with a serious pursuit of the one thing needful? Are there not, in some instances, examples in your own houses to recommend these follies? Do you not encourage, or at least indulge, professing parents in teaching their children a greater care about the things of time, their fortune or a genteel appearance, than their eternal interest? You may carefully instruct them in the first principles of the christian religion, and pay attention to their decent regular behaviour; but this is far from being the whole of your duty: and if you do this only, they will be little benefited by your labours. You should deal closely and faithfully with their consciences; you should explain the nature and urge upon them the necessity of a change of heart, a pardon of sin, and reconciliation with GOD through the atoning blood of JESUS CHRIST, and of that holiness without which no man can see the LORD.

SOME of you may have such a scanty allowance for your support, that you are under the necessity of spending that portion of your time in providing for your families, which otherwise ought to be spent in endeavours to instruct and save a rising generation? Or, in order to avoid this, you may have been obliged to take upon you such extensive charges, that you cannot duly attend to the lambs of the flock. These disadvantages to youth, and hindrances to the success of the gospel, I have long seen and lamented. Indeed I am almost persuaded to believe, that, when Ministers are in such straitened circumstances that they cannot attend to the instruction of their people, it is not their duty to administer sealing ordinances. It is evidently absurd and extremely sinful to receive children into the flock of CHRIST by baptism, and then for the shepherds totally to neglect them.

BUT as for you, my brethren, who are in more easy circumstances, remember you are under the most sacred obligations to exert yourselves to the utmost for the salvation of all under your charge; and especially for the children you have received into your respective societies. You have to answer for their souls as well as the souls of others. They are as much entitled to your pious instructions, and as truly under the government of the churches, over which you preside. The salvation of man, the honour of GOD, and the prosperity of  
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Zion as much depend upon your faithfulness to them, as any other part of your charge. If you neglect to instruct them yourselves, or to see that it is rightly done by parents, or others who may be employed in the catechetical business, you contradict your own principles and practice in receiving them into the church, render their baptism an absurdity, and yourselves extremely criminal. If you baptize the children of ignorant or vicious parents, trust their religious education to them, and neglect it yourselves, what advantage can they receive from their church-membership? And in such circumstances, is it not evidently absurd to plead for it as a privilege? Is it not a criminal profanation of this sacred institution of CHRIST?

AWAKEN therefore your attention to this important duty; exert yourselves with suitable zeal and activity in the discharge of it, and thus endeavour to save these precious souls from destruction, and prepare them for eternal life. If instead of these endeavours, you spend your time in improving your knowledge in the learned languages, in amusing yourselves with the finest poetical productions, or other elegant performances, or in any matters of more curious speculation, your time is trifled away, and the duties of your office neglected. Be assured it will afford you but little comfort when lying on a death-bed, or standing at the tribunal of JESUS CHRIST, that you even excelled in your knowledge of these things; if it is done at the expence of a good conscience, or the meanest soul belonging to your charge. You may be employed in thoroughly studying your sermons; arranging your ideas in the exactest order; clothing them in fine language, adorned with all the tropes and figures of rhetoric; rounding your periods, that they may sound with greater majesty, or flow on with sweeter harmony; or in studying how you may deliver these laboured discourses with all the graces of oratory. This you may imagine is doing well. But what have you effected by all this labour? You have rendered your discourses almost entirely useless, less instructive and edifying than the extemporary harrangues of the illiterate. The chief end that can be expected from such productions, is to please the taste, or gain the applause of a few; while the young and unlearned, which constitute the main body of your audiences, receive not the least advantage. You may blame them for an irreverent attendance on religious ordinances, and a neglect of their own eternal interest; but give me leave to say, that the fault in a great measure, is yours. They are as sheep without a shepherd; there are no pastures provided on which they can feed; the instructions given they cannot understand; they are therefore wandering in ignorance, and starving in sin.

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**WHEN** you stand on the verge of the grave, and the light of eternity shines in upon you, it will be small comfort to reflect, that you have composed and delivered such a number of fine discourses ; and thereby pleased the taste of a few and obtained their applause. In that solemn hour, it would give you unspeakably more satisfaction to think that you had diffused a spirit of piety among a rising race, and trained up children and youth in the fear and love of **GOD**. To be conscious of unfaithfulness and negligence, in that serious moment, when just about to appear at the tremendous bar of **GOD**, will be attended with terror that is the beginning of hell,

**O**, my Brethren, let not the world, nor the amusements of gay and fashionable company, nor the pleasures of polite literature, nor fine composition, nor laboured ornaments of style, nor the charms of oratory, ever divert you from the sacred and important duties of your office, which you owe to **GOD** and a rising generation. You and they are dying creatures, your time is short and uncertain, the work is great and important, their souls infinitely precious, and your final reckoning solemn and deeply interesting.

## II. **TO RULING ELDERS** in Churches, which have stated Pastors, and in those which are vacant.

**YOU** are called, my Brethren, to be officers in the church of **CHRIST**, and your business is to assist in its government. A very important trust ! You have not only to take care of your own souls, but the souls of others also are committed to your charge. If you imagine that all your business is to make information, when required, of bad conduct in any of the members of the church ; to see that your Minister's salary is collected ; or direct about building of churches ; you have no adequate idea of the many and important duties of your office.

**YOUR** business is, though in a private way, to teach and direct the ignorant, to admonish those who are in danger of falling, to reprove offenders, to comfort the feeble-minded, and to pray for and with those that are afflicted in body or in mind. In dealing with offenders, you are not to be wholly employed in the exercise of authority ; but are prudently and tenderly to deal with mens' consciences, in order to convince them of sin and lead them to repentance ; and to enforce your various endeavours, by exhibiting in your lives a shining example of virtue and piety. The church of **CHRIST** is a school, where  
disciples

disciples are to be trained up for the important business of the heavenly state ; and you are Trustees, appointed to govern and direct the affairs of this important seminary, so as to answer these great purposes.

BUT what I have, on this occasion, more particularly in view, and would seriously remind you of, is your duty to children and youth ; who, as you have heard, are members of the church of CHRIST ; and are therefore an important, and in some respects the most important part of your charge.

IT is your duty, in your several places, and as you have opportunity, to see that the heads of families, in your respective quarters, regularly keep up the worship of GOD in their houses ; and are careful to bring up their children for him. Parents should be warned, on proper occasions, of the sin and danger of a lifeless formality, and of the absolute necessity of worshipping GOD in spirit and in truth. They should be warned of the danger of teaching children a mere form of words, while no proper pains are taken to make them sensible of the great importance of divine truth, and of the absolute necessity of the life and power of godliness, and of their becoming new creatures, and having CHRIST formed in their souls. Proper care should be taken, that parents use their authority and influence with their children, to keep them as much as possible from vicious company, and restrain them from profane and immoral conversation and practices. When children are come to a proper age, they are, in their own persons, to be considered as subjects of church-government. If they then conduct out of character, they should, by the officers of the church, be admonished, and reprov'd, in a solemn, faithful, but tender and friendly manner. These admonitions should, at suitable seasons, be joined with humble fervent prayers for a divine blessing. If private admonitions do not succeed, so as to reclaim them ; information should be made to the church, more help obtained, and farther means used for their repentance and reformation. In all this, you should have respect, not only to becoming forms of worship and external decency of manners, but especially to the religion of the heart ; and endeavour by all these means to promote it. It appears to be the mind of CHRIST, that children be received as members of his visible church, that they have a right to this privilege, and that he is much displeas'd with his disciples, when they forbid them ; but in many places, how little regard is paid to them, even by the officers of the church !— They are neglected and left to wander, as sheep without a shepherd ; and thus all the advantages they might

might have received, and which it was the mind of GOD they should have received, are partly, if not totally lost. By this neglect, together with the criminal conduct of many parents, their very baptism is rendered an absurdity: though we plead for it as a privilege, we impiously rob them of its advantages, and expose the very idea to the contempt of the ignorant.

**THIS** neglect, my brethren, is undoubtedly our great crime; let us duly consider and lay it to heart, sincerely repent of our sin, and speedily reform our practice.

**CONSIDER**, Sirs, the value, the unspeakable value, of the precious, immortal souls committed to your charge. They are the rational creatures of GOD, the children of his Providence, the care of CHRIST, the price of his precious blood, the seed of his church at present, and the hope of future generations. By all the regard you have to the authority of GOD, the dying love of JESUS, the salvation of precious souls, the present and future prosperity of Zion, and to the temporal and eternal interests of mankind, be persuaded to diligence and faithfulness in the discharge of the important duties incumbent on you; and watch for the souls committed to your charge, as those who must give account to that GOD whose they are.

**PERHAPS**, you are ready to say, *Who is sufficient for these things?* Happy for us, had we a deeper sense of our own insufficiency, if it should lead us to a greater and more humble dependence upon divine grace for wisdom and faithfulness. However, let us never plead our own insufficiency as an excuse for laziness or negligence. If you are convinced, that the state of the church where you reside, calls for your services, and are at the same time conscious of your want of natural qualifications, such as knowledge and prudence, let this excite you more diligently to improve such talents as you have. I can assure you, that one of the best means of improvement is to be carefully engaged in the duties of your office: But add to this attentive reading, and frequent conversation, with those of most knowledge in this subject. If your deficiency is the want of moral qualifications, such as a heart more engaged in the work, more love to CHRIST and precious souls, more zeal for the coming of CHRIST's kingdom and the prosperity of Zion; then consider, that whether you act as officers in the church, or only as private members, these graces are absolutely necessary. Let a sense of your want then excite you, with all suitable earnestness and perseverance, to seek these, and all other graces of the HOLY SPIRIT; seek with full purpose

pose of heart, never to rest until you obtain your request. Since these qualifications are absolutely necessary, even for private christians, let us not think to excuse ourselves in the want of them, and ease our consciences, by avoiding our duty; but let us rather fly to the throne of grace, *that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.* If by your want of qualifications, you mean that you are entirely void of saving grace, then you have indeed reason to be alarmed; then you are in truth unfit, not only for performing the duties of an Elder, but every other duty of the christian life. I must then tell you with plainness, though I would do it with tenderness and respect, you are in a miserable state, for the wrath of GOD abideth on you. Your being Elders may be pernicious to your precious souls; as it may prove a temptation to you to keep up a hypocritical profession of that religion you know you are not possessed of; and to stifle the convictions of your own consciences. If you are in this unhappy case, I must honestly tell you, that you have no business with offices in the church of CHRIST, though you may be elected to them by the unanimous voice of your neighbours. You have reason to dread the wrath of heaven, that hangs over your devoted heads; to prostrate your souls at the footstool of divine grace; to accept of that mercy of GOD which is still offered, though long ungratefully refused; and begin to live to his glory.

LET me beseech you, my brethren, to endeavour to stir up, in yourselves and neighbours, a thirst after the knowledge of GOD in CHRIST, and a spirit of grace and supplication. As a church we have sunk exceedingly low; we have lost sight of the character of the children of GOD, and the spirit of christianity has departed from us; we are strangers to the dispositions and practices of growing christians; the fear of GOD is not before our eyes; we have imbibed the spirit of the world, and are conforming to its sinful ways. We may think to recover by reviving old forms, or by introducing new ones; but these efforts will all be vain, the evil lies much deeper than these externals, it is rooted in the heart. The fallow ground of our hearts must be broken up, we must sow no longer among thorns; the pride of our hearts must be brought down, we must be emptied of self-sufficiency, stripped of self-righteousness, and our sins set in order before us; and our souls must be brought prostrate at the feet of a sovereign GOD and gracious Redeemer. This will never be the case, until the SPIRIT is poured out from on high, and we are brought by its divine influences to a deeper sense of the reality and importance of eternal things. Fervently plead with GOD then for this blessing,

and stir up others to join in the important request. Desist from your excessive pursuits of the world ; forsake your vain amusements ; and *seek the LORD, till he come and rain down righteousness upon us.* As a church we have been distinguished by Divine Providence, and favoured above most upon earth. Through the goodness of GOD we have retained the protestant doctrines of the reformation, and the plain simple modes of worship, unadulterated with those errors, and human mixtures, that have disgraced some other churches, and our forms of government are agreeable to reason, and the word of GOD. But we have greatly abused these mercies of heaven, and are sunk under its angry frowns. Oh, let us humble ourselves before the LORD, and under a penitent sense of our base ingratitude, earnestly plead that he would return in mercy ; that he would *bow the heavens and come down, that the mountains might flow down at his presence !*

### III. I would also address myself to those who sustain the important relation of PARENTS.

I. I WOULD beg the serious attention of those parents, who, though they still profess to believe the christian religion, and to pay some regard to it as a divine institution, neglect to introduce their children into the church of CHRIST, by the ordinance of baptism.

THIS omission, in some of you, proceeds from carelessness about the duty you owe to the precious souls of your children, which GOD has committed to your particular care. You acknowledge the obligation ; but your consciences are not suitably awakened, nor your hearts duly impressed with a sense of it. You may imagine, that because you never promised to bring up your children for GOD, you are not very strongly bound. It is no uncommon thing for people to complain, “ That the obligations ministers lay upon parents at the baptism of their children, are too strong, that they bind them up too tight ;” when, in reality, they lay no obligations upon them at all ; but only require them to make a public and solemn profession, that they will submit to, and comply with, the obligations laid upon them in the word. Such persons seem to imagine, that they are not bound to live to GOD, to worship him in their houses, bring up their children in his fear, or set them a good example, until they bind themselves to these things by their own promises. One would suppose that they look upon themselves in the light of hirelings, who after they have made a bargain to serve a man, acknowledge they

they are bound ; but think themselves under no obligation previous to that voluntary agreement. Seriously remember, my friends, that you are bound by the rightful authority of that **GOD**, who made and constantly preserves both you and your children, to bring them up for him, whether you ever promise it or no. Your promises do not make the duty ; they only recognize, and bring it home to the conscience. You are bound ; and you cannot possibly free yourselves from your obligations, either by acting or forbearing to act, or by any thing whatsoever in your power. When you desire to keep free of obligations to your Maker, is it not as much as to say, *Depart from me, O GOD ; for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways ?* It implies a disowning the **LORD** of heaven to be your **GOD**, and consequently an acknowledging yourselves to be the servants of the devil, devoted to sin and ruin. Your careless neglect of the souls of your children is a certain evidence that you neglect your own salvation. You are required to *seek first the kingdom of GOD and his righteousness*, and to *lay up treasure in heaven* ; but instead of this you are busy and anxious about the affairs of this transitory and uncertain life, laying up treasure for yourselves and your children on earth, and neglecting to provide for that most important and eternal state, to which you and they are hastening. O, let me tenderly beseech, and solemnly charge you, duly to consider how exceedingly sinful your careless negligence is, and how destructive it is like to prove to yourselves and to your tender offspring.

**OTHERS** of you neglect this duty, through consciousness of your want of proper qualifications to educate your children in a right way. Perhaps you are conscious that you are void of saving grace ; that you have not been truly penitent for your sins ; humbled before **GOD** for your numerous transgressions ; and disposed to turn to him with all your hearts, by faith in the **LORD JESUS CHRIST** ; that you are void of true love to **GOD**, and real delight in holiness ; and that therefore any pains you might take with your children, would be hypocritical and vain. Or perhaps you are so irregular in your lives, that you know your bad example would render all your endeavours with your children ineffectual ; and besides, this prevents your having the assurance necessary for the discharge of your duty. Your own consciences condemn you, cut the sinews of your endeavours, and stop your mouths, that you cannot seriously recommend the ways of **GOD**, even to your own children.

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**BUT** if you have no grace, pray why have you none? Or why are you so unconcerned about it? Why do you trifle in such a wretched condition, and in the neglect of a matter of such vast importance? Do you imagine that your want of love to **GOD** frees you from your obligations to serve him, and take proper care of the precious souls he has, in his Providence, committed to your charge? Is your being in a sinful ruined state any reason why your children should be left eternally to perish in their sins? Do you not know that if they perish through your neglect, the blame will fall on your guilty heads; that their blood will be found in your skirts; and you be answerable for their ruin, as well as your own? Or are your lives so immoral, that you cannot bear the inconsistency of a religious profession? And pray, why are your lives so bad? Are you under any fatal necessity of sinning against **GOD**, by breaking his laws and abusing his mercies? Do you not feel within yourselves that you act freely; and that your vicious practices are all voluntary, performed without any compulsion on your minds? Why do you not repent of your sins, and forsake them? Are you restrained from this by almighty power? Or do you voluntarily choose to continue impenitent? Are you not called to it? Are you not tenderly entreated to turn and live; and is not your refusal an act of your own choice? Have you not the offer of a free pardon of all your sins, and many great and precious promises to encourage you to accept of it? Are not your vices like to damn your own souls, and those of your dear offspring? Are you not wilfully and obstinately running the dreadful hazard of this? You may be sensible that you have not knowledge sufficient to teach your offspring the doctrines of christianity, and train them up in the ways of piety and virtue. You have in your early days neglected these matters, and grown up in ignorance of **GOD** and divine things; and now, when you have children, you know not how to bring them up in a religious way, and are therefore only training them up for the world. You may imagine this ignorance will excuse you in the neglect of your childrens' souls: but pray, is not this ignorance your own fault? Have you not the means of instruction in your hands? Have you not, or might you not have, bibles in your houses? Have you not frequent opportunities to receive public instructions? Do you not mispend much precious time, and waste the sacred hours of the sabbath in idleness, or often much worse than idleness? Have you not neighbours both able and willing to instruct you? When you need it, you apply to them for instructions in your worldly business, and why not about the great business of salvation? Are you not then ignorant through  
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your own criminal neglect of the means of knowledge? And do you suppose such wilful ignorance as this is excusable? Can you be excused for living in darkness, while the sun shines around you; living in darkness, only because you will not open your eyes? Do you believe in your consciences, that this plea will be sustained at the impartial bar of GOD in the great day, when all disguises shall be taken away, and every thing appear in its true light? O, how surprisngly stupid and thoughtless are many men and women, who rush into the married state, beget and bear children, and become answerable to GOD for their souls, while carelessly ignorant of their Maker, of their own sinful and very wretched state, and of the way of salvation through JESUS CHRIST! The principal end of marriage is the raising up a godly seed. What a dreadful account then must they give, who bring up their children like the beasts that perish! Though they may try to excuse themselves now, I doubt not but their children will rise up in judgment against them at last, and condemn them at the tremendous bar of GOD.

THINK, O think, ye careless ignorant parents, how great and important the work that lies upon your hands, to secure your own salvation, and train up the souls of a rising generation for GOD, for heaven and immortal glory! Consider how little time you have for this work, and how dreadful your future reckoning, if you neglect it! How absurd your anxiety about the temporal interest of your children, while you are careless, whether salvation or damnation be their eternal portion!

SOME may refuse to introduce their children into the church of CHRIST, and keep them from partaking of the root and fatness of the good olive-tree, through the influence of some unhappy prejudices.

IT is no secret that our church has been long unhappily divided into several parties, which are distinguished by their peculiar names; and there are differences that subsist among those of the same name. There are Revolutioners and Covenanters: Burghers and Anteburghers among the Seceders; old-side and new-side, the foes or the friends of Whitefield; and the advocates for old psalm or new psalms. But notwithstanding these divisions, and subdivisions, in our church, there is still, however strange it may seem, the greatest unity of sentiment subsisting among us that is perhaps to be found in any protestant church on earth; and of this, I think, you must be sensible. Do you not know that all these different parties still

maintain the same fundamental principles of religion, and the same form of church-government ; that they have the same mode of worship, dispense the same gospel-ordinances, and that substantially in the same way ; that they teach children the same religious principles, and direct them the same road to heaven ? Whatever corruptions may have taken place in some parts of Europe, in America, as far as I learn, Presbyterians generally adhere to the true doctrines of the reformation. And do you believe in your consciences, that a Minister, or any particular church, believing, or not believing, that the national and solemn league and covenant were both in matter and form, binding on posterity ; that their believing that the seceders had sufficient reason to depart from the established church of Scotland, and that their terms of communion were exactly agreeable to scripture, or their not believing it ; that their believing or not believing that old-side or new-side, the foes or friends of Whitefield, were in the right ; or that their believing, or not believing, that it is most agreeable to the mind of CHRIST, and for the edification of his people, to sing Rowe's version of David's psalms, or Watts's imitation, or that it would be proper, or improper, to sing Hymns composed agreeable to scripture, by uninspired men ? I say, do you believe that a minister, or particular congregation's, receiving or rejecting any of these opinions, is a sufficient reason why you should keep yourselves and children out of the church of CHRIST, and deprive them of the use of any of the ordinary means of salvation, which he has appointed ? Are these sufficient reasons for depriving your children of the privilege of church-membership, to which GOD has entitled them, excluding them from the fold of CHRIST, and suffering them to be scattered in the wilderness, or devoured by beasts of prey ? I think an honest and well-informed conscience will testify that these reasons will not be found sufficient, when we appear at the tribunal of JESUS CHRIST. Endeavour to lay aside all pride, passion, stiffness of temper, and party-prejudice ; place yourselves as in the immediate presence of a heart-searching GOD and judge, and act, as you are, in a calm, deliberate and solemn hour, persuaded in your consciences will be most agreeable to his will.

BUT possibly your prejudices may lie against infant baptism : You have at least scruples about it ; you are not fully satisfied that it is sufficiently warranted in scripture. If this is the case, duly consider what has been already said upon that subject, and then say, do you seriously believe in your hearts, that children have no right to the privilege of church-membership, and that it would really be no benefit to them to be

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under the care of a well-ordered christian church? Are you fully persuaded that depriving them of the privilege is not doing a real injury to your rising race, or to future generations? Are you sure that you are not robbing your offspring of an advantage, to which the ancient and present generation of GOD's children were entitled, and that you are not thereby doing lasting injury to the church of CHRIST? Take care your hearts do not deceive you, and that you do not plead scruples of conscience as an excuse for neglecting your duty. If your hearts are backward to duty, and you are impelled to it only by the lashes of conscience, they may be fond of such an excuse, and eager to embrace it; when if you would carefully and impartially examine the secret motions of your minds, you might find that you are not influenced in this case by tenderness of conscience, but by a disobedient disposition.

2. THERE are some who have left the church in which they were educated, and whose principles and forms they saw no reason to dislike, and applied for baptism to ministers of other societies, who either acted from laxer principles, or were unacquainted with their moral character; merely because they were too vicious in their lives, or too negligent of the duties of religion, to continue in communion in their own church. They chose to apply for this ordinance where no regard was paid to moral qualifications, and where they might professedly devote their children to GOD, while they openly and practically devote themselves to the service of the world, the flesh and the devil.

SUCH I would seriously ask, what was the true reason of your acting thus? Was it not because you did not choose to forsake your vices, and live as become christians? Had this been your choice, were not the doors of your own church open to you? Was your leaving your church to avoid its discipline a step you believe GOD will approve? Do you suppose that the baptism of your children will profit them, when all the duties to be enforced by it are neglected? Do you imagine it will be any real advantage to them to be called members of a church who exercise no discipline over you or them? Who take no care whether you bring them up in the fear of GOD, or in the service of the devil? Whether you set a bad or good example before them? Whether you observe or neglect religious worship in your houses? Or whether you teach your children truth or error, or altogether neglect their religious instruction? Do you suppose that this is the way for children to partake of the fatness of the good olive-tree? Did you take this step from a

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principle of conscience, and a sense of duty to your Maker, and to your children? If you did not, do you not know that you was guilty of profaning the ordinance in an awful manner, and thereby exposing yourselves to an aggravated condemnation? Be not angry with me, when I deal closely and solemnly with you. I must tell you plainly that, in this instance, I fear, it was ignorance, ill-nature, pride and impenitency that led you to the altar of GOD; and that you did not approach in the fear and love of GOD, and under a serious sense of your obligations to him. Perhaps you was affronted by having your faults reprov'd, and determin'd to gratify a haughty and revengeful disposition, by showing your former church that you would not be beholden to them, but could answer your end without them. Now on calm reflection, what do you think of this? Do you think it was like a disciple of JESUS CHRIST, and what you can justify at his tribunal? Is not the discipline of the church one of the ordinances of CHRIST? And is not flying from this his ordinance, flying from CHRIST himself, considered as your King and Lawgiver? And is it not very strange and criminal conduct, to fly from CHRIST in order to have your children baptized in his name?

LET me earnestly exhort you to return, I do not say, to your former church, use your discretion in that, but to a penitent sense of your sin, and your obligations to your Maker; to a holy fear and reverence of his name, his worship and his ordinances; and to a proper care about your own salvation and that of your children. Remember, a holy GOD will not be thus trifled with, nor suffer his ordinances to be profaned with impunity. No, he will be avenged on such a people as this, he will ease him of such adversaries. Oh, how extremely shocking to the tender feelings of a pious heart, to see profane sinners, under the influence of corrupt and turbulent passions, partaking of holy things with a bold and daring presumption! Tremble, daring sinner, tremble at the thought, to thy GOD thou must answer it!

3. THERE are other parents, and I am afraid many, who professedly devote their children to GOD in baptism, and on that solemn occasion, also profess their faith in CHRIST and subjection to him; profess to consecrate their houses to GOD, as little churches, where his holy name shall be daily worshipp'd; profess that they will *bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the LORD*; and yet live in a great, if not total, neglect of these duties. They are at little or no pains in teaching their children, and seldom or never worship GOD in their houses.

**SOME** plead no excuse, and pretend to no other reason, but their carelessness. They thoughtlessly live in the neglect of known duties, and as stupidly repeat their vows from time to time. Is this, my friends, the case, the unhappy case, with you? Do you really live in the daily supine neglect of family and personal religion, and that without any excuse, sufficient or insufficient, contrary to the dictates of your own judgment and conscience, in defiance of **GOD'S** commanding authority, and in the wilful violation of your own solemn vows? Are you indeed capable of putting on the mask of religion, in order to have your children baptized; and solemnly vowing to **GOD** that you will bring them up for him, while you deliberately neglect the performance? Do you make these promises to **GOD** with a view to break them, and thus bring upon yourselves the guilt of perjury? Do you mean, at the time, thus to trifle with the searcher of hearts? Or do you enter into these sacred engagements just for forms sake, without ever seriously considering what you are about? You may possibly have some reserve under the expression, "Through the assistance of divine grace:" and conclude that your promise is made with the condition that **GOD** assist you, that he does not assist you, and that you are therefore not bound by your promise. If this is the case, you are under a gross and dangerous mistake. The intent of your promise is that you should be diligently using the means, doing the things you have promised; and in doing, not in neglecting, depend on divine grace for assistance.

**BUT** it is possible you may have a plea. You acknowledge you are bound by the authority of your Maker and by your own promises, you feel the obligation of your vows: but you plead your bashfulness, and think this some excuse for your omission, especially when you have company besides your own domestics, and more especially if they are persons of any considerable figure in life. You are afraid they will ridicule you, and call you hypocrites. But are you a disciple of **CHRIST**, and more ashamed to worship **GOD**, than the slaves of sin and Satan are to ridicule his worship? **CHRIST**, when working out our salvation, never forsook his duty, but resolutely persevered in it, though reproached with being a madman, possessed of a devil, and in alliance with Beelzebub the prince of the devils; and will you be ashamed to bow your knees before him, lest it expose you to the sneers of the most thoughtless of the human race? I know there are many in our guilty land, who, though they have some external appearances of decency, are so void of any reverence of their Maker, that they affect to treat things sacred with contempt; but they are in fact the vilest of mankind, a  
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reproach to the name of a gentleman, and quite unworthy the regard of a serious christian, and of that respect that is sometimes wrongfully paid them. They call for the pity, but merit the contempt, of every honest disciple of JESUS. Ought you not to be more ashamed to sin against GOD in presence of such men, by violating your engagements, than to worship him agreeable to your profession publicly made? Are you ashamed to honour your Maker before men, who are mere worms of the dust? What! And not ashamed to dishonour him by your sinful neglect? Let me beseech you duly to consider, that if you are ashamed of CHRIST before men, he will be ashamed of, and disown you, before his Father and before his holy Angels. If you, or one of your children, was condemned to die by the laws of your country, and there was the smallest ground to hope for a pardon, bashfulness would not hinder you earnestly to petition, and do whatever was in your power, in order to obtain it. Why then should bashfulness prevail in the present case to your eternal condemnation, and probably that of your tender spring?

It may be you neglect family religion, because you find yourselves under the influence of some corrupt disposition, or sinful passion, which you know is contrary to the nature, and inconsistent with the exercise, of religion. For instance, you may discover so much illnature, such a crabbed disposition, so much peevishness towards your wives, children, or other domestics, that you are ashamed to convene your families for religious worship, because you know it is so greatly inconsistent; and besides, conscious guilt makes you shy of GOD, and disinclines you for those religious exercises that would bring his holiness and justice to your minds. But surely you cannot plead your illnature, or the peevishness of your temper, as an excuse for neglecting family religion; but only mention it as an aggravation of your crime. You may say, it is not that your temper is so very bad, but your wife, or your children, are so extremely perverse in their humours, that it would discompose the most patient man, and unfit him for the duties of religion: It is not your fault, but theirs. If this is truly the case, it is your great unhappiness, and their aggravated sin. It is always the duty of a wife to encourage and assist her husband in the religious education of their common children; and the duty of the children reverently and devoutly to attend family worship, and thankfully to receive and improve all the pious instructions given.

**HERE** I would observe, that family worship should never be neglected because of the absence of the Father. In this case, the Mother ought to take place; and lead her children as it were to the throne of grace, and there pour out her soul before **GOD** in humble fervent supplications on their behalf. This is a duty she owes to her Redeemer, and to her offspring; a right performance of which would be an excellent example, and produce happy effects on the minds of children.

**BUT** perhaps it is your own fault that the perverseness you complain of prevails in your houses. It may be owing to some neglect of suitable instructions, to a wrong exercise of parental authority, to a morose behaviour towards your wife, or to your setting a bad example before your domestics. If so, you must first reform yourselves, before you can reasonably expect to reform your households. Let the great unhappiness and sinfulness of your present situation excite you speedily and earnestly to engage in this good work, and steadily to pursue it, until it be happily accomplished. As it is with you now, you cannot honour **GOD**, you are living in wretchedness and disgrace, you are daily contracting fresh guilt, you are bringing ruin on yourselves and on your offspring. This perverseness of temper in your family, suppose it to be real, is far from being a sufficient reason why you should neglect religion in your houses; it rather shows, in a very striking manner, the great necessity of it. It should excite you to confession of your sins with more humility and brokenness of heart, to petition with more frequency and fervency of spirit, and fill you with admiration and gratitude that as a family you are not made the monuments of divine wrath. If the fault is chiefly your own, it is so far from being an excuse for the neglect either of personal or family religion, that it is a very cogent reason why you should realize your need of renewing, pardoning and sanctifying grace; and with suitable importunity and perseverance plead and wrestle with **GOD** for it. O, Sirs, if you had a proper sense of the majestic glory and unspotted holiness of **GOD**, and of his infinite love and mercy manifested to guilty miserable men in the life, sufferings and death of **CHRIST**, it would humble your hearts, compose your passions, and sweeten your tempers! It is for want of the spirit of **CHRIST**, that this evil spirit prevails in your hearts, or in your houses; therefore speedily and earnestly apply to him, who cast seven devils out of Mary Magdalene, to dispossess you of this, which is like to prove so fatal to you.

**OTHERS**, through excessive complaisance, or to indulge their own taste, or that of some of their family, permit so much levity

ty of behaviour and conversation, so much vain mirth, or so many sinful or trifling diversions, as quite indisposes the mind for the instructions of religion, or the solemn exercises of devotion; and for this reason they are commonly omitted. These gaieties of life you may delight in, and plead for them as innocent amusements; but if they exclude religion from your houses, or indispose your minds, or the minds of your children, for the serious exercises of devotion, they are far, very far, from being innocent. Many professing parents, I am afraid, greatly dishonour religion, and hinder its progress, by imbibing the spirit and conforming to the manners of a gay and fashionable world. They, or their children, must be in every gay circle, and at every polite entertainment, in order to rub off rusticity, to polish their air and conversation, and qualify them to make a genteel figure in life. But thus, they too often rub off, or prevent, all serious sense of God and divine things, and become very politely indisposed for the divine exercises and for the refined and exalted pleasures of devotion. It is a melancholy truth that many of our polite Gentlemen and Ladies are in the service of the flesh and the devil; and their external accomplishments qualify and enable them to serve their master with more success, and with more danger to those young people, who are so unhappy as to associate with them. Scarce any thing, downright wickedness excepted, will more effectually indispose the mind for serious Godliness, than a taste for vain mirth and trifling diversions. This is verified in fact; for it appears from daily observation that a person no sooner gets to relish these amusements, and view them as important, but serious things are treated with ridicule, or become an intolerable burden. But do you imagine, my friends, that it will afford you any real satisfaction on a death-bed, when you come to view things in the light of eternity, to recollect that you and yours have laughed away your days and nights in merry fashionable company: or that you have excited in your children a taste for polite entertainments, modish visits, and all the fashionable follies of the day? Do you not believe that in that solemn moment, it would give you infinitely greater satisfaction to reflect, that you had instructed them in the knowledge of religion, given them a taste for the heavenly exercises of devotion, and brought them to a high esteem and veneration for a crucified JESUS; that you had spent that time on your knees, which you have spent at balls; that instead of idle, and perhaps wanton songs, you had been singing the riches of redeeming love; that instead of amorous tales and merry jokes, you had been seriously discoursing about CHRIST, and the way to glory; that instead of learning your children the polite falshoods of the world, you had been

been teaching them the fashions of the new Jerusalem; that instead of wasting your substance on feasts, and useless ornaments of the body, you had spent it in acts of kindness and charity to your fellow-creatures in distress? Should you see your children dying in their sins, do you think it would afford you any satisfaction to recollect that they had cut a genteel figure in life? Should you see them becoming companions of devils, would you please yourselves with the thought of their having been complimented and carressed in every polite company? Or will your hearts exult in the thought that they once gracefully danced round, and round, in giddy circles, when they are about to hear their final sentence, *Depart accursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels?* No, my friends, death and eternity will give you quite different views of things, raise different sensations in your minds, and teach you a language altogether different from what you are now disposed to use. Then, when it is too late, you will bitterly lament the waste of precious time, and ruin of your poor children. O, for another year! O, for another day of the Son of man! How would I plead with God for salvation! How would I plead with my children to repent of their sin, and fly from the wrath to come! O, for a few of those precious hours we have spent together in folly, to confess and bewail our sins, and plead for eternal life! But time is gone! It is wasted! It is murdered! My children, my dear children, are ruined! Their precious souls are ruined, eternally ruined, through my sinful folly and cursed negligence! Oh, how will these thoughts pierce your souls like a thousand daggers, and murder every support of the sinking heart!

OTHERS are so constantly and eagerly engaged in a hurry of worldly business, that they have but little time, and much less heart, for the heavenly exercises of religion. Their hearts are so engaged to serve Mammon, that they cannot serve the God of Jacob. Their hearts are so intensely engaged in pursuit of earthly treasure, that they cannot lay up incorruptible treasure in heaven. Yes; the business of the present life so engages your attention, and your time, that for its sake you neglect your own and your childrens' eternal interest. You have a numerous family; they must be provided for. You have a certain rank in life; that must be maintained. Your children must be genteely supported, or they will fall beneath their equals, sink into disgrace in the eye of the world, and thereby ruin their fortune; and it requires much labour and care to effect all this.

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**BUT** do you not know, my friends, that real Christians are dead to the world, that their treasure is in heaven, and that they have no other rank to support than that of humble followers of **JESUS CHRIST**; and that every thing else which they do, or possess, should be subservient to this? Do you not know that the soul is infinitely more precious than the body, and eternity infinitely more important than time; that it is much more necessary for you and your offspring to be rich in knowledge, in grace, and in good works, than to possess much of those *riches which take to themselves wings, and fly away*? Is it not much better for your children to rank with the suffering despised followers of **JESUS**, than with the wealthy, the gay, and the honourable of this world? Dives, with all his wealth and sumptuous fare, was much more miserable than Lazarus in his extreme poverty, and with all his filthy sores. Realize how exceeding guilty and cruel you are to expose your own souls and those of your children to eternal ruin, only to provide a temporary support for their dying bodies; to secure homes for them here, where they can abide but for a few days, while you neglect to provide for them mansions of eternal rest. Know assuredly, that if their consciences are awakened on their death-beds, they will not thank you for your preposterous pains; certainly they will not, when standing at the tribunal of their Judge.

**BUT** I suspect there is some latent deceit in your plea, and that the truth is, the love of money is the reigning passion of your hearts; and that therefore you delight not in **GOD**: that wealth is your chiefest good; and therefore you seek it as the greatest good of your children: that avarice has alienated your affections from **GOD**; and therefore you desire not the knowledge of his ways: and that you have time to give your children a pious education; but no hearts to improve it. You neglect the true riches, in order to heap up shining dust for yourselves and for yours: but Oh, death will make you poor indeed! All your wealth will not procure you a single drop of water to cool your tongues, parched in the unsufferable flames of divine vengeance.

O, ye careless negligent parents, the precious souls of your descendants are committed to your care, and you criminally neglect the important charge! The vows of **GOD** are upon you, and you regard it not! The weight of your guilt is greatly increasing, and you feel it not! The storms of divine indignation are thickening over your devoted heads, and you tremble not at the dismal prospect! The heavy curse of the **ALMIGHTY** is lying on your children, and you are easy! Death and judgment

ment are approaching, and you are unprepared, and unalarmed ! By your criminal neglect of personal and family religion you are making your spiritual privileges the occasion of your destruction. You are converting the house of GOD into the gate of death ; the balm of Gilead into the most deadly poison. You have lost the true spirit of christianity, you have lost the religion of the bible, you have lost the religion of the reformation, for which your forefathers suffered, bled and died ; and are sunk into the most amazing and destructive carelessness and insensibility. Once Presbyterians had not only the form of Godliness, but felt the life and power of it on their souls. They were zealous to maintain good works, diligent and faithful in duty, lived near to GOD from day to day, dreaded sin more than death, and were ready to resist even to blood, striving against it ; and consequently enjoyed the smiles of heaven, the light of GOD's reconciled countenance, and joys of the Holy Ghost. *But how is the gold become dim ! How is the most fine gold changed ! We are fallen ! We are fallen ! We are fallen !* The glory is departed, and the crown is fallen from our heads ! We are estranged from GOD, and asleep in our sins ! We have practically denied the Redeemer, and joined with his enemies ! We have betrayed the Son of man into the hands of his foes, and crucified him afresh ! We have forsaken the path of life, and are going down to the chambers of death ! We are training up our own offspring, at least by our example, for eternal destruction ; and thus staining our consciences with the guilt of their blood ! *Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways ; for why will ye die, O house of Israel ?*

4. THERE are some parents who seem very zealous to have their children initiated into the christian church by baptism, and would no doubt esteem themselves and families highly injured, should they be denied this privilege ; who yet, for the sake of some little worldly advantage, perhaps a few pounds in the price of a tract of land, or the benefit of a better range for their cattle, will deprive their children of all the advantages of church-membership, and all rational prospect of enjoying them. It will be of little or no advantage to be members of the catholic church, or of the christian church at large ; we must, in order to our receiving any real advantages, be members of some particular church, join in its worship and ordinances, and be under its discipline ; and therefore those who settle with their families out of society, and where there is no rational prospect of any being formed, do voluntarily excommunicate their children with themselves. They remove them from the fold of CHRIST, take them from under the care of his shepherds, and  
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leave them to feed in unwholesome pastures, or wander in barren deserts. The consequence is, they commonly grow up in ignorance, disregard the interest of religion, are profane and immoral in their lives, neglect all the means of salvation, and often forsake the christian church altogether. The common excuse for thus excommunicating children is, that it was easier in such a particular part of the country to provide for them, than elsewhere : but they mean, only for their bodies, they have no reference to their spiritual and eternal interest.

SUCH parents I would beseech, duly to consider what they are doing, and what will be the probable consequences of the step they have taken. Does it not appear to you, my friends, on serious reflection, that you are much out of your duty ? Are you not injuring your children in their essential and most important interests ? Are you not preferring their temporal to their spiritual and eternal advantages ? Do you not know that you are bound by divine authority, and your own voluntary engagements, to bring them up for GOD ? And does not this imply that you will take care, as far as in your power, that they enjoy the advantages of the dispensation of the word and ordinances of the gospel, and of christian discipline ? Do you not then neglect the duty you owe them, and violate the sacred obligations you are under ? Do you not by this means help to scatter the flock of CHRIST, instead of collecting, increasing and leading it into pleasant and wholesome pastures ? Do you not discourage and weaken the hands of your brethren, who would build up the walls of Jerusalem ? Perhaps you will say, you only deprive your children of outward privileges and opportunities, you do not deprive them of the grace of that GOD, who can work by what means he pleases, or even without means. But then remember, when you deprive them of means, you deprive them of all that is in your power to do for them. The use of means is the creatures' duty ; the success is only of GOD. Though you do not deprive them of life, you deprive them of the means of life ; and you cannot expect that GOD will work without means, or go out of his ordinary way, because you have wandered from his church.

IF, in settling in a new country, any have, through inadvertency or disappointment, fixed themselves where they have no rational prospect of enjoying the advantages of religious society, let them duly consider, whether it is not their duty to collect themselves into societies, though it should expose them to some considerable secular disadvantages ; and thus return to the sheepfold, and dwell beside the shepherds' tents. In some parts  
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of the land, you are so scattered, so unconnected, that you can scarcely be said to be in the church, or to enjoy any of the benefits of communion. Even if under the care of a pastor, he can be of little advantage to the lambs of the flock, in its dispersed situation. Your distance from the places of worship is so great, that when you attend them, you are obliged to leave your children idly to wander about, and mispend sacred time ; by which they lose a reverence for the sabbath and the proper holy exercises of the day. As long as you were influenced in your settlement by sinister views, and a greater regard to the temporal than spiritual interest of your descendants, you have just reason to consider your conduct as sinful, repent of it, and return to your duty ; otherwise, you may live to see the punishment of your crime in the vicious lives of your children, when it is too late to correct them. Seriously consider, what a poor retaliation a few more acres of land, or a little better settlement, will be to your children, for the want of the means of grace, or the advantages of being brought up under the care of a christian church ; and how little satisfaction you will derive from it, when you and they must part, only to meet again at the tribunal of JESUS CHRIST.

5. I would address myself to such parents as may properly be called *profane*, that is, those who totally neglect both the profession and practice of religion, and rather seem to despise it—who take no pains at all to educate their children in a religious way ; but allow them in the open practice of profanity and immorality, and encourage them in it by their own example. It makes no difference with me, what circumstances of life you are in, what rank you hold, or by what name you are distinguished.

I FIND it too common for persons who are possessed of good estates, or aim at high rank, to behave and speak as if they imagined themselves rather above religion, and that it would be quite out of character for them to pay any serious regard to it. They sometimes confess with an air of contemptible pride and levity, that they know but little about it. These affected airs are most commonly discovered in those of low birth and fortune, who have suddenly sprung up to a state of some little eminence, whose acquaintance with the polite world is very contracted ; and who are therefore apt to mistake every man for a Gentleman, who can dress genteely, and laugh at religion ; and hence they labour to distinguish themselves in that way. Perhaps you may call yourselves church-men, and think that a kind of excuse for paying very little regard to religion. When  
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you see a person treating religion as a matter of importance, and making what you call, a great fuss about it, you conclude him to be a Presbyterian, a Baptist, or a Methodist; and look upon it only to be the effect of hypocrisy or enthusiasm. As you despise piety yourselves, you never instruct your children in the principles of christianity, nor even teach them to pay a proper reverence to the DEITY. They seldom hear the name of GOD, except in a profane or trifling way. You do not warn them to avoid all sin, to fly from the wrath to come, and lay hold of everlasting life. You sometimes take them to church; but it is not with a view to their receiving any useful instructions, but rather as an amusement. You never point out to them the depravity of their nature, the necessity of renewing grace, an interest in the merits of CHRIST, a pardon of sin, reconciliation with an offended GOD, and of holiness of heart and life. You never join them in solemn earnest prayer to the ALMIGHTY; but rather teach them to despise these things.

Do you, my friends, verily believe in your consciences, that you and your children were made merely for this world, and that you have no eternity to provide for? Do you suppose that he, who made you and your children, has no regard to your conduct; but has left you to act just as you please, without any respect to his will? Do you believe, that all the noble powers of human nature; man's capacities of knowing GOD, and his own moral obligations to him as his Creator and bountiful Benefactor, and himself as a conscious and accountable being, were all bestowed for the low purposes of the present life? Would GOD bestow such noble powers on a mere butterfly, to enable it to sport in the air a few days, and then perish forever? Do not your consciences testify against you, that you have offended GOD, and provoked his displeasure? Do you not see and hear your children daily provoking their adorable Sovereign and most liberal Benefactor; and thereby laying themselves obnoxious to his righteous indignation? Is it not most reasonable that you and they should deeply repent of your sins, and return to GOD with your whole hearts? Ought you not to thank and praise him for all his goodness to you and your families, and make it the great business of your lives to please him? Since your children are accountable creatures, ought you not to teach them their dependence upon their Maker and Preserver, and to live in thankful remembrance of his mercies? Do you imagine it would do your children any real injury, should they become sincere christians; that it would make them more miserable, or worse members of society? Are you persuaded that the name, the day, the worship and ordinances

of GOD ought not to be revered, and his authority cheerfully submitted to? Are you certain that GOD gave you children, only that you might take care of their bodies and provide for their temporal interest; and that you are under no obligations to promote their eternal interest? Do you not find that it requires much pains to teach your children a decent genteel behaviour; and does it not appear reasonable that some proportionable pains should be taken to teach them a proper temper and behaviour towards their Maker? Do they call for careful tuition in every thing relative to this life, and does nature teach them all that is necessary relating to the life to come? Does it teach them a complete system of morality and religion, without any assistance? Are you sure your children are in no danger of everlasting destruction, or that you are under no obligations to endeavour to save them from it? If you neglect their religious instruction, and set them a bad example, do you not expect that you will be charged with their ruin? Are you not commanded to *bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the LORD*?

STOP; O, stop your mad career of folly and sin, and think what you are about, before it is too late! With a friendly voice, I would call you to repentance, to seek regenerating grace, and that sound conversion, of which you may often have heard with a sneer of contempt. Conversion you greatly need, for you are essentially wrong, both in your temper and practice. Were you so happy as to be the subjects of this necessary change, you would no longer disdain religion, sneer at the exercises of devotion, nor profane the name of GOD and the ordinances of religious worship. Then you would experience a happiness far superior to all the pleasures of sense; you would *rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory*. Then your hearts would be drawn out in new, pure, and spiritual love to your children. You would no longer neglect their salvation; but diligently exert yourselves in instructing them in the way of life, and earnestly plead with GOD on their behalf. Remember, Sirs, your children are heirs of immortality, and candidates of an eternal state of existence. These precious immortal souls, the price of the blood of the Son of GOD, he has committed to your care, and bound you by his reasonable command, and by all the tender ties of nature, to train them up for him. This is the most important business of your life, and you must answer for the faithful performance in the judgment of the great day. You may trifle with it now, if you will, you may laugh at it, if you please, and continue to neglect your important charge; but then, O, then, you will find it a solemn reckon-

ing ! I call upon you to seek the **LORD JESUS**, and a pardon of your guilt through the merit of his atoning blood, to submit to him as your divine Teacher, and to seek that holiness, without which you cannot see the **LORD**. Seek these things in earnest ; for they are infinitely important : seek them speedily ; for much of your precious time is already wasted : seek them with perseverance ; for without this you have no promise of success. Banish vice and profanity from your houses, and consecrate them to **GOD**, as little churches. Instead of balls and assemblies, the sound of the viol or the wanton song, let them resound with fervent prayers to **Almighty GOD**, and songs of praise and thanksgiving to **HIM** who loved us, and gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and make us a peculiar people zealous of good works.

6. **SOME** parents are strict in the outward forms of religion ; they punctually go the stated rounds of duty, are careful to catechise their children, and constantly worship **GOD** in their houses ; and when they have done this, seem to be quite contented. And yet they appear strangers to the power of **Godliness**, if not open enemies to it. If their children patiently join with them in their religious forms, and refrain from scandalous immoralities, they seem entirely satisfied, as if nothing more was necessary to constitute them good christians ; and are contented they should live strangers to renewing grace, and sound conversion. Such persons are mere formalists, resting in externals, and strangers to the energy of divine grace.

Do you imagine, **Sirs**, that true religion consists in such a formal round of external performances ; without deep humility, without evangelical repentance, without faith in **CHRIST**, in the promises, and in the invisible realities of another world, without supreme and ardent love to **GOD**, without a sensible delight in holiness, or any comfortable manifestations of the love of **GOD** to your souls ? If so, you are under a very great and ruinous mistake. Real religion consists in no such lifeless formalities ; it transforms the very soul, and animates it with an inward new principle of spiritual life and vigour. Your external conduct is commendable and worthy of imitation ; all that is wanting is this inward principle of spiritual life, the animating soul of true religion.

If you are so unhappy as to communicate this formal spirit to your offspring, and foster it there, it may prove very fatal to them, and prevent, or destroy, all the good effects of your religious instructions, and leave in their minds a lasting prejudice  
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against vital piety. To them it may turn the means of grace into the occasion of eternal death. You may formerly have heard of Presbyterians, and lately of Baptists and Methodists, who have been much engaged in religion, and made high pretences to a work of GOD's spirit in their souls; but have acted, at least according to your information, under the influence of dangerous mistakes, and wild enthusiastick delusions. These things have led you into a quite opposite extreme, and fixed in your minds a strong prejudice against all intense inward concern about our spiritual estate. Your children may observe you much more frequent and earnest in exposing these delusions, than in recommending a solicitous concern about the one thing needful; and this may have a very pernicious influence both on their principles and practice.

I am not about to plead the cause of enthusiasm; I know it is very diverse in its nature from true religion, and subversive of its interest. I would only guard you against the opposite extreme; the extreme of a lifeless, hypocritical formality, which perhaps is not less inconsistent with true religion, or displeasing to GOD, than this wild enthusiasm. The latter is certainly not oftener, or in stronger terms, reprov'd in scripture, than the former. There are no means in your power so effectual to discountenance enthusiasm, as to exhibit in your own lives a shining example of a warm, lively, animated, rational, steady, meek and humble christian. This do, and your example and conversation will be of great use to your neighbours, and a happy means of preserving them from wild and enthusiastic errors. This do, and you will find a number of those, whom you now despise as wild enthusiasts, to be humble, teachable christians; willing to sit at your feet, and learn from you, the true temper, exercises, conduct and character of a child of GOD. But if you do not this; but content yourselves with your lifeless forms, live in the spirit of the world, and now and then lend a grave face to countenance folly, in vain you plead, in vain you storm, against enthusiasm: your very conduct and conversation is the occasion of promoting it.

LIVE the life of such a christian; and then you will be happily qualified to guide your children, in the paths of vital holiness, to the land of eternal rest. At present you are under the influence of a self-righteous spirit, resting in external forms; which is most dangerous to yourselves, and which you should most carefully guard your children against. The outward forms of religion were never intended to be rested in; but were designed as means to lead the soul to rest in CHRIST, and

engage men to live a life of piety and virtue : and they have never answered their proper end, until this happy effect is produced.

O, ye mistaken formalists, the great work of your salvation is yet to begin. You have hitherto been building on the sand, and your work is all in vain, it will not stand the storm. The sure foundation is yet to lay. Your religion, by which you thought to win heaven, is like to land you in hell, and prove the occasion of your eternal destruction. You are in danger of leading your children, along the same formal road, down to the chambers of death. You are lukewarm Laodiceans ; *you are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked* ; while you vainly imagine, you are *rich, and increased in goods, and in need of nothing*. For this reason you are in danger of being rejected and disowned by CHRIST, together with your offspring. Awake from your pleasing delusion, your cold and hypocritical formality, and from your carnal ungrounded security ; and never rest till CHRIST be found in you, till you are new creatures, actuated by His Spirit ; till old things be done away, and all things become new : that you may not only have the form, but also the power of Godliness ; and not only enjoy the privileges of CHRIST'S church on earth, but the privileges and blessings of his church triumphant. O, realize how dreadful the disappointment, to pass from the church of CHRIST and the society of christians, to the regions of darkness, and the society of devils and despairing sinners ; from songs of praise in Zion, to the groans of the damned in hell ; from the pleasing hopes of heaven, to the gloomy horrors of endless desperation ; from the reputation of christians, to everlasting shame and disgrace.

You have, it may be, been settling your children on false foundations of hope and comfort. If so, tear these foundations away, with the eager hand of a pious benevolence, warn them faithfully of their danger, and teach them to build their hopes of heaven upon CHRIST the Rock of ages. Your time is short, much has been spent in lifeless modes and forms ; your work is great and infinitely important, despatch it with your might ; CHRIST is at the door, death and judgment are at hand. After all your pains with your children, and all your hopes concerning them, they may at last charge you with their eternal destruction. Through your fault they may die with a lie in their right hand. Pluck, O, pluck them as brands from the burning, that they may be quenched in the fountain of a Saviour's blood.

7. I doubt not but there are a number of pious parents, who have with honest hearts devoted their children to GOD, sincerely desirous that they should be, and act, to the glory of His name ; and are with diligence, and anxiety for the event, endeavouring to train them up for the service of their Redeemer. These also I would beg leave to address on this occasion.

You, my christian friends, have realized the worth of your childrens' souls, the vast importance of your charge, the difficulty of the work, and the awful solemnity of the account you must render to that GOD, whose your children are, and who has charged you with their religious education. You feel the weight of your obligations, and are often saying, *Thy vows are upon me, O GOD.* I would tenderly and earnestly exhort you to persevere in your duty ; labour to be more diligent and faithful, more solemn and affectionate in your exhortations, more fervent in your prayers on their behalf, and more exemplary in your deportment before them, making your lives a proper comment on all your religious instructions. Be faithful to the last, and humbly trust in GOD, who is able to make even feeble endeavours successful, and has greatly encouraged you to hope for his blessing. You are, in your sphere, labourers in GOD's vineyard ; he has called you to the work, the prosperity of his church depends on your exertions, and the blessing of heaven will follow them.

If you have not been successful hitherto, impartially inquire into the reasons. Some deficiency or mismanagement in you may have been the unhappy cause. If so, repent of your failings, reform what is amiss, and pursue your work with a steady perseverance. I frequently recollect that children are a part of the flock of CHRIST, the care of a Redeemer, and the purchase of his precious blood, subjects of his kingdom on earth, and conditional heirs of immortal glory. Let this be a spur to your diligence, and an encouragement to your important labour of love. *In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand ;* for thou knowest not which will prosper. It depends, under GOD, on the *present* generation, whether, in the *next*, religion shall have any existence on earth, and especially on those who are entrusted with the education of children and youth. This lies chiefly on pious parents ; who must see and feel the importance of these things. Ignorance, infidelity, impiety, and immoralities of every kind, are the natural and necessary consequences of neglect in this affair.

**BESIDES** your own endeavours at home, take proper pains that your children, as often as opportunity presents, attend upon public worship; where the word and ordinances of the gospel are clearly and faithfully dispensed. Make their attendance as easy as possible, and give them all the encouragement in your power. Let them know that they have been solemnly dedicated to the service of God, are members of his church, the care of CHRIST, and the charge of his Ministers, who are bound to watch for their souls as those who must give account. Endeavour to dispose their minds to a serious attention to things that concern their eternal peace, and there is great reason to hope, they will profit by the word, and grow wise unto salvation. Teach them early to behave, at times and places of religious worship, with decency and reverence; and frequently inquire what they remember, and how they understand; and tenderly urge upon them the necessity of feeling the force of divine truth, and reducing it to practice. If they do not improve by private or public instructions as you would wish, be not rash in reproofing them, use no reproachful or degrading language; but bear with them with patience, reprove them with tenderness and due solemnity, and continue to teach them with diligence. To train up children for God is one of the most important duties of your life; and he has encouraged you to hope, and believe, that it will not be in vain. You may have the happiness to see your children recovered by these means from a state of sin and ruin, and brought to a state of life; and they may join you on earth in singing the praises of redeeming love. But if this should not be the case, they may reap the happy fruits of your labour after you are asleep in the dust, and may join you in the regions of glory in ascribing salvation to GOD and the LAMB; and bless you to all eternity, as the happy instruments of their recovery from the ruin of sin. Even though this should not be the case, you will have the comfort, when you lie on a death-bed, and are taking your last leave, to reflect that you have been faithful to their souls, and are clear of their blood. Or, if they should be first called away, and should die in their sins, amidst all your deep sorrow on this very distressing occasion, you will be supported by the inward testimony of a good conscience.

**MANY** children are so unteachable in their disposition, so perverse in their humours, so backward to religious duty, so fond of gay company and sinful diversions, and so apt to esteem, even a tender parent, as an enemy, who attempts to restrain them, that the difficulty of your work is hereby greatly increased; and you are perhaps tempted, at times, to say there is no  
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**hope.** All this is greatly heightened by the almost universal neglect of other parents, and the consequent bad example of neighbouring youth. Your children think it strange, that you will not suffer them to run into the same excess of riot. To keep them constantly at home, and from the company and conversation of those of their own age, would be like confining them in prison ; and they can scarcely go into company, but they are in danger of being poisoned in their principles, or corrupted in their morals. This, I own, is a serious difficulty, and a very great discouragement to conscientious parents ; and it reminds me, that it is time to bid you that are parents adieu, and address your offspring. I come now

**IV.** To address myself to **CHILDREN** and **YOUTH.** To those children who have been devoted to **GOD** in baptism, and enjoy the benefit of a religious education ; and to those who have not been favoured with this privilege.

**I.** To you, my young friends, who have been early devoted to **GOD**, and instructed in the principles of the heaven-born religion of **JESUS.** Listen, for a few moments, to an aged Minister of **CHRIST**, who knows the tender feelings of a father's heart, and is in some measure sensible of the worth of your souls, and the importance of salvation.

**DULY** consider the great goodness of **GOD** to you, in that you have been born in a christian land, where the light of the gospel shines ; in that you have been favoured with christian parents, who have early devoted you to **GOD**, and been careful to teach you the way of life ; in that you have been introduced into the christian church, and made partakers of the root and fatness of the good olive-tree ; in that you have lived under the special protection of a kind Providence, enjoyed the lively oracles of divine truth, been favoured with **GOD**'s appointed means of salvation, faithfully warned of the evil of sin, called to repentance, and invited to a Saviour's arms ; in that you are kindly and earnestly entreated, and favoured with many great and precious promises, in order to excite you to fly from destruction, and lay hold on eternal life ; and in that you are favoured with a space of repentance, and **GOD** in his long-suffering is waiting to be gracious to you. Many children, as worthy as you, have not been favoured with these privileges. Their parents have unkindly neglected them, and they have been brought up in ignorance, being *aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise.*

**IMPROVE, improve, O my children, these rich means, these precious privileges, these golden opportunities of grace. They are worth more to you than mountains of gold, or all the advantages the world can give. Seriously realize, that you are sinful creatures, that your nature is greatly corrupted and that your lives have been spent in forgetfulness of GOD, unthankfulness for his mercies, and the transgression of his laws ; and that therefore you are in a miserable, condemned state. Earnestly seek regenerating grace, deeply repent of your sins, embrace an offered Saviour, and in him pardon and reconciliation with an offended GOD ; turn to GOD with your whole hearts, and take him to be your LORD and portion forever ; and as you are his by creation, preservation and solemn dedication, be his also by your own voluntary choice and deliberate act. Give up yourselves to him, and actually devote your lives to his service ; renounce the devil and all his works, the “ pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh.” Deliberately and repeatedly resolve, that you will live to him ; that the BLESSED JESUS shall be your Saviour and your LORD ; that you will ever trust in his merits, bow to his government, and live to his praise.**

**Do not despise the wise instructions and admonitions, the faithful reproofs, nor even corrections, of your parents ; for they are the ministers of GOD to you, appointed to instruct you in your duty, and to reprove and correct your faults ; and they are accountable to him, and not to you, for the faithful performance. If you resist them, you resist the ministers of GOD ; and if you despise their instructions, you cast contempt upon the authority and goodness of your Maker. The corrections of your parents are stronger and more genuine expressions of love to you, than the most flattering indulgences of others.**

**STOP your ears against profanity and infidelity, whether they come from the poor or the rich, the vulgar or polite, the little or the great men of the world. Bear testimony against such, as far as you can do it with prudence ; and be assured, that whenever pretended young gentlemen use such infidel and licentious language to other youth, and especially to young women, it is a certain evidence either that they are fools, or have some base design. Never listen with pleasure to any obscene or immodest discourse, however seasoned with wit. Spend not your precious time in reading plays, novels, and romances ; for they will only corrupt your taste and your heart, fill your minds with extravagant ideas, and indispose them for serious**

rious instructions. Plead not the moral sentiments of these authors ; for you may receive more useful moral instruction from one chapter of the book of Proverbs, than from whole volumes of these modern productions of taste. Consider the destructive tendency of what is commonly called civil mirth and innocent diversions ; they consume precious time, they alienate the heart from serious things, and indispose the mind for devotion : they make the soul shy of GOD, and averse to the sweet and solemn duty of prayer : They often reconcile the heart to vanity and sin ; first make them familiar, and then pleasing. Avoid all meetings for mere diversion ; such as plays, balls, and the like. These are bewitching means to murder time, and ruin immortal souls. Whatever may be said for mere men of the world, who seek not heaven, these are not fit exercises for the children of GOD, and heirs of immortal glory ; and cannot be relished by one whose heart is seasoned with grace, and warmed with the love of GOD.

LET not inclination, company, or any thing, tempt you to mispend the sacred hours of the sabbath. This is precious time, consecrated to the service of GOD ; see that you seriously improve it. He that mispends the sabbath is walking on the devil's ground, and is in imminent danger of falling into his snares. You may refrain labour and worldly conversation, you may read your bible and other good books, you may be diligent in learning your catechism, you may join with your parents in their morning and evening devotions, and attend public worship every opportunity, and yet be far, very far, from spending the day as GOD requires. You must not only do these things, but do them in a proper manner : you must do them with deep humility of heart, and in the exercise of evangelical repentance ; with faith in CHRIST and the promises of the gospel ; with love to the Supreme Being, and gratitude for his many unmerited mercies ; with zeal for the honour of GOD, and the coming of CHRIST's kingdom ; and with christian benevolence to your fellow-creatures, and especially those who are perishing in their sins. You must spend the sabbath in seeking a rich furniture of grace to fortify you against the temptations, and strengthen you in the duties, of the week. When you have opportunity, diligently attend public ordinances ; attend them with due preparation and prayer, and an earnest desire to profit by the means. When you have not this opportunity, carefully attend private instructions in the family. Spend much of these sacred hours in secret, conversing with GOD, and your own hearts. In these retired moments, carefully examine into the state of your souls, and learn to  
know

know yourselves. For this purpose, take your bibles with you in your retirements, single out suitable passages, examine and try yourselves by them, turn them into prayers to Almighty God, plead that you may understand them in a saving way, and feel their powerful influence on your hearts. Be not content to read and hear the word only; but labour to make the proper improvement, by reducing all to practice. Remember, you are soon to be the principal supports in the church of CHRIST, the chief pillars of his earthly temple; be careful and diligent that your heads may be so furnished with knowledge, and your hearts so refined by grace, that you may act in this case, with proper usefulness and dignity.

CONSIDER the importance of becoming truly religious in your early days. The powers of human nature fail in old age. He that would labour for God effectually, and make advances in holiness, must begin early in life; and it will be your greatest honour and happiness to do much for God and religion, in your day. Whatever may be the case with others, can you expect ever to receive the grace of God, if you misimprove the rich means and many precious opportunities you have enjoyed in your childhood, and now enjoy in your youth? Can you imagine that if, under all these advantages, you spend the prime of your life in the service of the flesh and the devil, God will accept of the dregs of old age? Do you not know that to harden your hearts against God and continue in sin, when he is doing so much for your recovery, is the way to provoke him to *swear in his wrath that you shall never enter into his rest?* That *he that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy?* My dear youth, to trifle here is to run into wilful ruin, to rush upon the thick bosses of the ALMIGHTY'S buckler, or the drawn sword of divine justice. It is the way to sin yourselves beyond the reach of mercy, and provoke God to give you up to all the horrors of black despair. Your season of grace will soon pass, precious means will cease forever, and you must appear in judgment to answer for the improvement you have made of the distinguishing favours you now enjoy. Let me earnestly entreat, and solemnly charge you, to seize the present moments, improve your present opportunities, seek an interest in the Redeemer, secure the special favour of God, and devote yourselves unreservedly to his service; lest the important work should be undone, when your time is no more.

2. But there are other youth, who have not been solemnly dedicated to God in baptism, nor enjoyed the benefit of a religious

gious education. Some indeed have been baptized through custom, or for the sake of the reputation of a christian name; whilst the baptism of others have been neglected, not from principle, but the want of principle, and a due sense of religion. These I would desire to address, with all the tender affection of a father; sincerely pitying them, that they have neither father nor mother in their very graceless natural parents.

MY dear children, I now tenderly invite and earnestly entreat you to attend, for a few moments, to the things that concern your duty to GOD and your own true happiness. You have lived, I suppose, hitherto a thoughtless life, regardless of GOD and that eternal world to which you are hastening. You have minded but little, except your worldly business, your food, your clothes, and your diversions. You have been greatly negligent of your duty to GOD, and unaffected with the evil of sin. You have not been seeking an interest in JESUS CHRIST, are great strangers to the solemn duty of prayer, and other acts of devotion. You seldom read your bibles; and when you do, you are not careful to understand and improve what you read. When you attend places of public worship, you do it only as a kind of diversion, to see company, or to show yourselves to advantage. You think seldom, or very slightly, of a future state, and of that solemn account you must at last give to GOD of all the deeds done in the body. If you can but mix with merry company, cut a genteel figure among them, and be admired by your acquaintance, this you esteem your greatest happiness. Great part of the LORD'S day you have spent in idle conversation, foolish diversions, or in unprofitable, and often very sinful visits. You have not remembered the sabbath day to keep it holy; you only remembered it as a day of amusement.

THINK seriously of this, and tell me, do you believe in your hearts, that the great GOD made you, and sent you into the world, for such trifling purposes as these? That you have business of no greater importance to be employed in? That you were born, only to eat, and drink, and dress, and visit, and sleep, and sport, and die? That you have no GOD to serve, no soul to save, no hell to avoid, no heaven to secure, no judgment to prepare for? Let me entreat you seriously to consider that you are not your own, that GOD made you, and not you yourselves; made your bodies, every member and every sense, with all the strength and beauty you possess; made your souls, with all their capacities of knowing, fearing, loving and obeying him; made them immortal and capable of the sublime exercises and pure joys of the heavenly state, through a glorious  
eternity,

eternity, in society of angels and saints. You are the children of GOD's providence; he has taken a kind and fatherly care of you all your days. His mighty power continually supports you; he preserves your lives, your limbs, your health and your reason; by his bounty you are clothed, his liberal hand feeds you, you walk on his earth and breathe his air, and his almighty arm is your constant guard. All the blessings and comforts of society and friendship you enjoy are the gift of your heavenly father. And are you not bound, by the most endearing ties, to adore and love, to thank and praise, to submit to and obey your glorious Creator and kind Benefactor? And do you not know in your consciences, that you have not done this? Have you not lived thoughtless of GOD, and unthankful for his kindnesses, rebellious against his authority, and disobedient to his government and laws? Do you not believe, that he is justly offended, and that you are exposed to his righteous displeasure, for your ingratitude and disobedience? Is there not something within you, that secretly whispers, *this will not do*; that you are in a bad way, living a life of sin that leads down to everlasting misery? Ought you not to be humbled before GOD, repent of your sins, renounce and turn from them with your whole hearts? You undoubtedly know in your own consciences, that this is your duty: why then, my dear youth, are things of such infinite importance neglected, and every trifle preferred before them?

UNACQUAINTED, as I suppose you to be, with true religion, you have undoubtedly been informed, that a gracious GOD has pitied your miserable estate, provided for you an all-sufficient Saviour, and sent him into the world to redeem you from sin and ruin by his own precious blood. You have been called to repentance, and had the offer of pardon and eternal life through the merits and intercession of JESUS CHRIST. Pray, what improvement have you made of these tender mercies, these rich and unmerited favours? Have you hearkened to, and obeyed, the gracious call? Have you repented of sin, and embraced your Saviour? Have you returned to GOD, and devoted yourselves to his service? Is JESUS CHRIST precious to your souls, is he *altogether lovely and the chiefest among ten thousand*? Do you not know that this ought to be the case; and that it is your great sin and misery, if it is not? Do not comfort yourselves in ignorance, and say, you know but little, *and where little is given, little will be required*. You certainly know much more than you practise; and might, under all your disadvantages, know much more than you do, if you would carefully improve such advantages as you enjoy.

I WOULD recommend it to you, my young friends, to retire, at least for once, by yourselves: seriously meditate on the majesty, holiness and goodness of GOD; realize that he is every where present, and constantly viewing your hearts, and all your actions. Consider that this GOD is your Creator, your law-giver and judge; and that you must soon stand at his awful bar, and give an account to him of every word and every action. Carefully examine yourselves, what you have done, and what is the state of your souls; whether you have truly repented of your sins, or whether you have lived in the love and practice of them; whether you are in the way that leads to heaven and glory, or that which leads down to the chambers of death and despair; and whether you are prepared for the approaching hour of death, and for a solemn appearance before your judge. Place yourselves as in the presence of a holy heart-searching GOD, and duly consider such scriptures as these, *Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of GOD. Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned.* Remember these are the words of JESUS CHRIST, who never spake any thing rashly, and whose words will stand, when heaven and earth are passed away. Search into their true spiritual meaning, and examine whether you have been born again; whether you have sincerely repented of your sins, and truly believe in CHRIST, to the salvation of your souls. If you are convinced that this is not the case, or care nothing about it, I must kindly, but faithfully, tell you that you are in a very miserable state, according to the plain and express words of JESUS CHRIST; his words shut the gate of heaven against you, and doom your precious souls to perish in all the excruciating anguish and unutterable horrors of damnation. Can you be easy in such a state as this? Can you sleep in peace, can you rise up and be merry, can you pursue your sports and diversions, and prosecute your worldly business with cheerfulness, while you are in such a deplorable condition? You are, my poor miserable youth, hanging over everlasting burnings by the brittle thread of life, and by your sins provoking the ALMIGHTY to cut that thread asunder, and suffer you to sink forever into the yawning gulph of hell. Tremble at the thought of your dreadful condition, and of those heavy mountains of vengeance that hang over you; humbly bow before the LORD, with broken hearts confess and bewail your manifold sins, and with suitable earnestness seek that grace which you absolutely need, and without which you must forever perish. Do not defer this till you are old, plead for no delay; now in the prime of life, in the bloom and vigour of your youth, seek the LORD,

seek

seek an interest in his special favour, seek him as your richest portion, and devote yourselves unreservedly, and forever, to his service. A gracious GOD invites you; the arms of mercy are open to receive you; a compassionate JESUS calls you: calls you from sin to holiness, from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to GOD, from the groans of hell, to the ineffable joys of heaven.

Now my friends, Ministers, ruling Elders, Parents and Children, permit me tenderly and earnestly to entreat, and solemnly to charge you, to pay a serious regard to what you have heard. Forget the meannets of the writer, and duly attend to the infinite importance of the subject. As far as I know my own heart, my aim has been to promote your spiritual and eternal interest; and for that reason I have not used flattering words, but have studied plainness and honesty in my addresses to you.

As I have before intimated, I believe we are, as to the power and practice of religion, a degenerate, fallen branch of the christian church; that the glory is departed, and the crown fallen from our heads; that we have in heart and in practice forsaken GOD, and that he has consequently forsaken us. Though we still remain amongst us the true doctrines of the reformation, yet I greatly fear, yea I venture certainly to foretel, that unless there is soon a revival of the power and practice of religion amongst us, a revival amongst Ministers and People, the most pernicious errors will come in upon us like a flood. A general corruption will ensue, or divisions will take place, and we shall split into parties. The true doctrines of the reformation, of salvation through the free and sovereign grace of GOD, and redemption through the atoning blood of JESUS CHRIST, will be lost.

WITH a mind impressed with a sense of this, and as in the sight and presence of almighty GOD, I would earnestly urge, and solemnly charge you, duly to consider your fallen state, return to GOD with your whole hearts, humble yourselves at the footstool of his throne, and plead with fervency of spirit that he would return in mercy, *and revive the things that remain that are ready to die.*

BY the extreme shortness and uncertainty of life, and the speedy and certain approaches of death and eternity—BY all the wilds and temptations of the devil, which are employed for the destruction of your souls; and that infernal rage with which

*he goes about seeking whom he may devour*—BY all the allurements of riches, honour, and pleasure ; and all the pernicious influence of bad company—BY all your inward lusts and corruptions, which threaten your eternal destruction—BY the commanding authority of the great JEHOVAH, and the strict requirements of his holy law—BY all the severe and tremendous curses, written in the book of GOD against guilty offenders—BY the justice and holiness of that GOD, *who is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and who will by no means clear the guilty*—BY all the exquisite pains and calamities of life, inflicted because of sin—BY all the terrors of divine vengeance and heavy mountains of burning wrath and fiery indignation, that hang over your guilty heads—BY all the dreadful consequences of being forsaken of GOD as a society, and given up to strong delusions, to sin, and to eternal ruin—BY all the bounties of a kind providence you enjoy in life, which ought to melt your hearts, and lead you to repentance—BY the amazing love of GOD to guilty sinners, in sending his Son to die for their redemption—BY the tender heart, the overflowing compassion, and melting dying love of the blessed JESUS—BY the deep humiliation of his birth, the afflictions, pains, labour and disgrace of his life—BY his deep sorrows, amazement, agony and bloody sweat in the garden—BY the murderous deceit and treachery of Judas—BY his false accusation and unjust condemnation, the buffeting and spitting, the scorn and derision, the cruel scourge and the crown of thorns—BY the accursed tree, on which he bore our sins in his own body, the nails which pierced his hands and his feet, his last groans and cries on the cross, and the bloody spear that pierced his sacred side—BY the winding sheet and the tomb, his resurrection and glorious ascension—BY the kind offers, gracious entreaties, melting invitations and precious promises of the gospel—BY all the means of grace, opportunities of instruction, good books, seasons of prayer, solemn sermons, and sacraments you enjoy—BY the speedy approaches of your own death, and the terrors of departing under the angry frowns of heaven—BY the great uncertainty and precarious nature of a death-bed repentance ; the self-upbraidings, severe accusations, and insupportable horrors of a guilty enraged conscience, in a dying hour—BY your final appearance in the presence of that GOD *who weigheth the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance*, who will come in flaming fire to take vengeance on the wicked—BY all the dreadfully majestic and Godlike solemnities of the day of judgment—BY the last and final sentence of, *Come ye blessed, or Depart accursed*—BY all the exquisite torments of hell, the unutterable groans of the damned, the streams of fire and brimstone, the weeping

and wailing and gnashing of teeth, the never-dying worm, and all the gloomy horrors of eternal despair—BY all the happiness of heaven, the springs of everlasting pleasure, the ineffable joys of paradise, the glorious mansions of rest, the rich inheritance of heaven, the immortal honour, the unfading crowns of glory—BY these, I say, and whatever else is sacred, solemn and endearing, I would with all humility, earnestness, and tenderness of affection entreat and beseech you immediately, diligently and earnestly to engage in the great and important work of religion. Cry, O, cry, unto GOD with fervency of spirit, that he would return in mercy, and visit his dying churches; that the SPIRIT of the LORD may be upon his Ministers, and that they may be anointed to preach the gospel, and dispense its ordinances, in a manner agreeable to the mind of GOD; that careless sinners may be awakened, and multitudes added to the church, such as shall be saved; that the languishing people of GOD may be quickened and comforted; that parents may no longer trifle with the ordinance of baptism or the precious souls of their children; and that children and youth may no longer dishonour their Maker and sink their own souls into ruin, by sinful pleasures, contempt of the divine mercies, and the violation of GOD's righteous laws. Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation; *to-day if you will hear his voice, harken not your hearts*; now is the rich season of grace, now heaven is in you offer, the arms of mercy are open to receive you, GOD the FATHER calls you, the compassionate REDEEMER calls you, the SPIRIT and the bride say come, all nature warns you to fly from ruin, and joins to invite you to holiness, happiness, and immortal glory. Improve the present season, stir up your souls to take hold of GOD, and resolve never to let him go, until he return in mercy, visit your souls, and abundantly bless his churches.

MAY the GOD of glory and of grace, with whom is the residue of the SPIRIT, bestow upon you all the riches of his goodness, and follow with his blessing this feeble essay.

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