

when we consider *who the Spirit is*, the incongruity of a sinful creature being clothed with the prerogative of bestowing him upon other sinners, cannot but strike every mind imbued with the least reverence for the Supreme Being. It is therefore a fatal objection to the doctrine that we are examining, that it assumes that the disciples of Christ were clothed with power to baptize with the Holy Ghost.

3. A third assumption chargeable upon this doctrine is, that the Apostles, to whom the last commission was addressed, and who received it immediately from their Master's lips, *were not so competent to understand its import as persons living eighteen centuries afterward*, and that they did actually mistake its meaning. For it is not denied that they understood him to refer to water baptism. And this was their interpretation of his language subsequent to the day of Pentecost, and when they were anointed with the Holy Spirit. It was after the "Spirit of Truth" had come upon them, who was to "guide them into all truth," that they fell into this grave error, and set up water-baptism as the initiatory rite of the Christian Church. Is not this dangerous ground? Is it not impeaching the inspiration of the Apostles, or impugning the accuracy of the New Testament writers? Can those who espouse these views seriously believe that the twelve were "filled with the Holy Ghost" when they so grievously mistook their Master's teaching on a point of great and lasting moment to the Church? If they erred here, why may they not have erred elsewhere? What is Divine in the New Testament, and what human? By what tests are we to discriminate between the true and the false? What certainty attaches to anything pertaining to the Gospel of Christ?

It is with a painful reluctance I give utterance to these sentiments. I have every reason which personal friendships and even hereditary descent can supply, to cherish an unfeigned respect for a society which bears on its roll of members names like those of William Penn. and Elizabeth Fry, and Joseph John Gurney. But in studying the Sacred Scriptures, I can know no man after the flesh. Men, it is well known, are often better than their speculative opinions; and what is still more apposite here, serious, useful, devout men may adopt erroneous and hurtful principles of interpreting the Bible, without flowing out those principles to their legitimate consequences. With every disposition to come to a different conclusion, I find myself shut up to the conviction that the method of interpreting the word of God, of which specimens have just been presented, is adapted to strip it of all certainty and all authority. If we may assume that the Apostles erred in explaining their Master's doctrines, what confidence can we place in their competency? And of what value are their writings to us?

Nor is this all. If *they* erred, who amongst *us* can possibly attain to any certainty in religion? We have, it is true, the promise of the Spirit to illuminate us. But we have surer evidence that *they* were "filled with the Holy Ghost" than we can have, in any given case, that *we* are under his plenary guidance. If he left them to mistake the meaning of a simple command, couched in the plainest terms, and relating to a point of great practical importance, with what reason or modesty can we hope to be preserved from error?

In truth, is there not something strangely presuming and visionary in the assumption, that we are better qualified to expound such a command—addressed, let it be remembered, directly to them—than they were themselves? Suppose it were possible to recall Peter, and John, and Paul (who, though not with them on Olivet, received a similar commission from the Saviour's lips); if we could bring these three illustrious men back to the world again for a little, can you imagine a scene more curious than that of a man of this nineteenth century, no matter of what country, tongue, or sect, standing up before them and saying: "You entirely misapprehend the meaning of your Master in his parting injunction—"