

It is well known that, from a very early period, the most extravagant notions prevailed in the church with respect to the efficacy of baptism, and its absolute necessity in order to salvation. The descent of the human mind from the spirit to the letter, from what is vital and intellectual, to what is ritual and external in religion, is the true source of the multifarious errors which have wasted the Church of God. From an erroneous interpretation of the figurative language of some passages in scripture, in which the sign is identified with the thing signified, very similar to the mistake which afterwards led to transubstantiation,—it was universally supposed the baptism was invariably accompanied with supernatural effects, which totally changed the state and character of the candidate, and constituted him a child of God, and heir of the kingdom of heaven. Hence, it was almost constantly denoted by the terms *illumination*, *regeneration*, and the highest operations of the Spirit, and was believed to obtain the plenary remission of all past sins; it was in order to insure that benefit, and at the same time to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, often deferred to the latest period of life. Thus Eusebius informs us, that the Emperor Constantine, "finding his end fast approaching, judged it a fit time for purifying himself from his offences, and cleansing his soul from the guilt of sin which he had contracted—which he believed was to be effected by the power of *mysterious words* and the *ving laver*." "This," said he, addressing the surrounding Bishops, "is the period I so much longed, and hoped, and prayed for, the period of obtaining the salvation of God." Passing, with the utmost rapidity, through the preparatory stages that of a catechumen, he hastened to what he considered the consummation, and as soon as the ceremony completed, than he arrayed himself in white garments, and laid aside his imperial purple, in token of his bidding adieu to all secular concerns. We have, here, a fair specimen of the sentiments which were universally adopted on this subject in ancient times. Justin Martyr, and Tertullian—in short, there is scarcely a writer in the first three centuries, who has not spoken on this subject in the same manner. The Roman Catholic Church teaches, that it is by baptism we are made the children of God. The Lutheran Church teaches the same doctrine, in the Augsburg confession, which was presented to Charles the Fifth, at the Imperial Diet, as the sentiments of that reformed body. The Church of England distinctly teaches in her liturgy, and in language of the strongest assurance—the priest, after baptism, returns thanks. "We thank thee, most merciful Father, that it has pleased thee to regenerate this infant with the Holy Spirit, to receive him for thine own child by adoption."

This is that erroneous doctrine which polluted the pure streams of the Gospel at most at the fountain head. From it sprang that strong hold of the *Man of Sin*, Infant baptism, a practice which has gone far in all ages, to make all church and no work. As soon as baptismal regeneration was received, the transition was natural and easy—for when men believed that regeneration and salvation came by baptism, they would see immediately the necessity of having their infants baptized. The only remaining difficulty was the want of faith in the candidate, required in the gospel, when want it was found could be met by substituting the faith of the parent, or what is worse, that of God-fathers and God-mothers, for the faith of the child.

It may be, you deny the charge of confounding baptism and regeneration. If you do, your case reminds me of the story of the woodman, "who was so intent and earnest in pruning the tree, that he cut off the very branch on which he stood." If from your letters you do not believe that pardon and regeneration are obtained in baptism, your system goes to cut off from the gospel tree of life altogether those superlative blessings.

You may inquire, does not the scriptures ascribe remission and washing away of sin, to baptism? No, the word of God in no place ascribes to baptism, separate from repentance, calling on the name of the Lord, or the resurrection of Christ, the remission or washing away of sin.

In Acts 2, when the three thousand cried, "men and brethren what shall we do," Peter did not say, be baptized for the remission of sins,—but *repent* and be baptized for the remission of sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. When Ananias was sent unto Saul—Acts xxii. 16—he said "Why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Here we would note that it was promised in Joel ii. 32, that "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Again it is said, 1 Peter ii. 21—"The like figure whereunto, even baptism, doth also now save us, (not the putting away the filth of the