

Let us take the most difficult passage, where it is said that Jesus Christ himself has cleansed His Church with the baptism of water. This appears to be a very extraordinary assertion; but the Apostle is here speaking of the invisible Church. If it is by the baptism of water the Church is cleansed and sanctified, then, from the thief upon the cross, to the present moment, there are thousands of the elect who have died without receiving water baptism; so, that Christ has not cleansed in the baptism of water his whole Church, but only a portion of it. The solution of this difficulty, however, is very simple; it is, that this baptism, or washing of water is plainly a figure. It has a spiritual sense. It is the word of God which has operated this washing, and not the hand of man; and this the more because Jesus Christ himself never baptized with water, John iv. 2. If "Christ has cleansed the Church with the washing of water by the Word, the meaning is that the Church was cleansed or baptised by the Saviour himself, not in water, but by the Word. "Now ye are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you," John xv. 3. It is the same idea which we find in the other two passages: "washed by the Spirit;" "saved by the washing of regeneration." We would notice, also, the passage, "eight persons were saved by water. The like figure, whereunto, even baptism doth also now save us," 1 Peter iii. 20, 21. There is here something much stronger in favour of water baptism than in the passages quoted from St. Paul, but the Apostle Peter has taken care to warn us that it is in "figure" only that the baptism of water saves; and in order to guard well against misconception here, and that it may be clearly understood that it is not the figure, but that which is figured, which saves; he adds this explanation, "not the putting away of the filth of the flesh," but what no baptism in water could possibly give, "the answer of a good conscience towards God," and this as the effect of the "resurrection of Jesus Christ." The distinction between the two baptisms, of water and of the Spirit, casts much light on the passage where baptism is not expressly mentioned, but where allusion is evidently made to it; "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into