

—as when one who enters into the service of a Prince, puts on his distinguishing attire; and the design of the sacred writer is, to remind those of them who had before professed the Jewish religion, that by a solemn act of their own, they had put off Moses, and put on Christ. It was their oath of allegiance to the King of Zion—that by which they avowed the Lord to be their God. Hence a rejection of it involved a rejection of the counsel of God. Luke vii. 30. Their rejection of the sign was justly construed as a rejection of the thing signified—as, when a rebel refuses to take the oath of allegiance, it is construed as a refusal of submission and subjection to his rightful prince.

Whatever may be said of baptism as it is now received and practiced by us, or of those who practice it, it was originally appointed to be, the boundary of visible Christianity. This is a principle which, if properly acted upon, would go far to prevent the confounding the church and the world, and which, consequently, would tend more than any thing of the kind to counteract ecclesiastical degeneracy and corruption. Had the Christian Church, in all ages, admitted none to baptism, from whomsoever descended, but those who professed to repent and believe the Gospel; a stream of corruption, which has actually deluged it with *Anti-Christianism*, would have been diverted at the spring head. The Church, indeed, might have been corrupted from other causes, but the carnal descendants of godly people could not have claimed a place in Christ's visible kingdom. The church could not have become national, embracing, as its children, all who are born in what is called, a Christian country, without any personal religion. The doctrine of believers' baptism, exerts a great influence on many who were never baptized by immersion, particularly among the thinking and respectable part of the community. I have known many instances of the kind—persons prevented from that duty from a fear of the reproach of the irreligious. An ordinance which thus operates possesses a mark of its pertaining to a kingdom which is not of this world, and into which it is hard for a rich man to enter.

Baptism is not only a solemn profession of the religion of Christ, but it is the first act of obedience required of the young convert. I do not say that it includes all gospel obedience, but it must be admitted that it is not only first on the list of Christian obedience, but is most important, as being associated by Christ in his commission with the condition of our salvation. "*He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved.*" That the gospel calls for obedience, is clear from the following Scriptures: 2 Thess. i. 8. "*The Lord Jesus Christ shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Heb. v. 9. "*Being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation to all that obey him.*" 1 Peter i. 22, "*Seeing that you have purified your hearts in obeying the truth.*"

Christ said, "*If you love me, keep my commandments.*" If the foregoing remarks be just, the importance of believers' baptism must appear in a very different light from that which some have represented it, who consider it of little importance, and even go so far as to disapprove of ministers impressing it as a command of Christ. If it be of little or no importance to bend ourselves to the Lord, in the way of his own prescribing, to confess his name before men—to avow our being dead to the world and alive to Christ—to preserve the church from being one with the world—to obey him who said, "*Repent and be baptized, every one of you*"—and to follow his example, who said, "*Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness*"—then may this excuse be admitted. But if these things are important, then is believers' baptism important, and all attempts to depreciate it, are offensive in the sight of Him who is the Lord and Sovereign of Zion.

I have thus, my dear Sir, distinctly given you my views as to the place and importance assigned to baptism in the holy Scriptures. In your last letter, you charge us with a practice (in requiring too much from persons we baptize) injurious to the souls of men; but I never knew a charge that could be retorted with greater justice. If I have rightly understood your views on what you consider the qualifications for baptism, I must affirm that they are not only unscriptural, but injurious to the souls of men, and the visible kingdom of Christ. Receiving persons, as believers, who never felt the love of God in their hearts, or their ruined state as sinners, and who were never born of the spirit of God into the visible kingdom of Christ, is not only injurious to the persons themselves, but to the true interests of religion in the world.

No error has done more injury to the religion of Jesus, and the true doctrines of the Gospel—or done more to build up the kingdom of Anti-christ, than your favorite theory: putting baptism in the place of regeneration and pardon of sin.