

## Confirmation: a Sermon

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Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.—Acts, viii. 17.

It is one of the excellencies of that part of the Church of Christ to which we belong, that she requires us to believe no doctrine, and follow no practice, that is not clearly sanctioned by the Word of God. She freely, and without any reserve, places the Holy Scriptures in the hands of all her children, as the only rule of faith, and calls upon them diligently to search them as containing the foundation of their hope, for eternity, and as their sure guide in their journey heavenwards. And she sees no reason for withholding them, because they contain many things hard to be understood, and many wrest them to their own destruction. Such a result must be expected, when men of rebellious wills and unsanctified hearts endeavour to scan and sit in judgment upon the ways of God. Nor does the lamentable fact that many are divided upon what is the true interpretation of the Word of God, and that in consequence religious parties and sects have arisen in the world, form any reason why the Book of God should be withheld from the people.

Such divisions and sects are quite as much to be expected as that men should wrest the scripture to their own destruction. In St. Paul's day, many, even in the Christian Church, were anxious to be distinguished as the followers of some favourite teacher, and it became necessary for him to rebuke them as the introducers of disturbance and contention. It was no more the design of Christ that His Church should be made of parties and sects, all warring one against another, than that His Gospel should prove to be the destruction of men. The prayer of the Saviour was for unity—that all his followers might be one. And St. Paul in writing to the Corinthians among whom dissensions had been created, says, "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment." But with all these cautions, there was no prohibition of the Word of God. Its truths were made known freely and without reserve. Those who had received them were urged to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Without this there could have been no advancement in the divine life—they would have remained dwarfs in religion instead of growing up to the stature of perfect men in Christ. And so it is now. Wherever the Scriptures are withheld from the people, darkness, gross darkness covers them. They are ignorant of their civil, as well as religious rights, and are the dupes of the most debasing superstitions. But the Church

of Christ to which we belong presents them freely and without reserve to all her children. As she was the first to translate them into our language and unlock the hidden treasures of the Gospel of Christ, so is she now anxious that all should know them and search them diligently. In all our efforts, then, to make known to you what you must believe, and what you must do to be saved, our appeal is to the Word of God. If you cannot find the doctrine, or the duty there, either expressed or arising from fair and legitimate inference, then it can have no claim upon your belief or your practice. I propose then at present to direct your attention to the subject of Confirmation; to the renewal of baptismal vows by the laying on of hands. First, is it sanctioned by the Word of God? Secondly, its benefits. Thirdly, the obligations connected with it.

First; *Is it sanctioned by the Word of God?* You will no doubt remember that the Saviour gave to His Apostles full authority to govern the Christian Church, and make such rules and regulations as might be necessary for its preservation, and the well-being of all its members. In order that they might be fully instructed, he had frequent interviews with them after His resurrection, and prior to His ascension. And we are fully authorized to believe, that He then unfolded to them, not only the mode in which it was to be governed and perpetuated, but also its whole internal regulations. St. Luke informs us that the Saviour showed Himself after His Passion, by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. And at the time of His ascension He solemnly invested them with their authority. This is His language—"Peace be unto you; As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." And when He said this, He breathed on them, and said unto them, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Here we have the transfer of Christ's authority to them, not to one of their number, but to all alike; and the great agent of the Spirit of God to qualify them for their work. This Spirit was, as Christ promised, to lead them into all truth. He was to show them not only what was true, but to keep them from everything false. Whatever then they enjoined or whatever practice or regulation they followed or set forth, is binding upon the members of the Church of Christ, and upon all who wish to become members till the end of time. If these things were necessary for them, they are necessary for us, and we cannot, without incurring guilt, reject them. Now we are prepared to examine whether the Apostles acting under the guidance of the Spirit of God, enjoined by their practice such a rite as Confirmation, the laying on of hands upon those who had been baptized. We have a case directly in point, recorded in the 8th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. Philip, who was only a Deacon