

THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL.

THREE RIVERS, FRIDAY 25th FEBRUARY, 1831.

AN INQUIRY INTO THE DOCTRINE OF BAPTISMAL REGENERATION.—No. IV.

“Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

1. Paul asserts positively of an indefinite number of persons thus: “Ye are all the Children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” Gal. iii. 26, 27. It is sufficiently plain, that what Paul here asserts of one he asserts of all. He calls all the Galatian converts the children of God by faith in Christ. Yet in another place he thus addresses these children of God: “O foolish Galatians, who have bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?” Indeed, if we were to judge of these children of God by the tone of reproof in which St. Paul speaks to them throughout the Epistle, and compare it with the modern doctrine of regeneration, we might fairly conclude that there was not a regenerate person among them. He commences upon them in these words: “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another Gospel;” and much of his epistle is of like kind.

2. In 1 Cor. xii. 13, Paul speaks in the same positive and indefinite terms: “By one Spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” And verse 27, “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” And Rom. xii. 5. “We being many are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another;” and this is the necessary consequence of regeneration.

3. St. Paul tells us, Eph. iv. 5, that along with the one body, and one Spirit there is but one baptism. But if a man is baptized at all, he is baptized into Jesus Christ, and has put on Christ, and by that one Spirit been made to drink into that one Spirit. The language he uses forbids the supposition of any exception whatever. But “if any man be in Christ he is a new creature;” therefore, if there is meaning in language, every baptized person, being in Christ, and a member of his body, is a new creature. But how so? As the newly naturalized subject of the kingdom, or one newly born into God’s family, and nothing more. Acquired habits and knowledge and graces are necessarily understood of the new creature no more than profound scholarship is understood of a child on his admission to school. The simply being the new man is the starting point of the Christian life, agreeably to Paul, in Rom. xii. 2. “Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind;” and not by regeneration. Or, as he expresses the matter at large in Eph. ii. 19–22: “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone: in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth into an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” In this it is evident that Paul is speaking, as in the other quotations, of the constitution of the Church as a body politic, composed of individual members or children of God by covenant, and of the end and object thereof, without at all describing the object as completed: its completion is to be effected by a godly life afterwards: and this perfectly agrees with the services of the Church, as well as pages on pages of Scripture.

4. Isa. lxii. 2. “Thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name.” Also James. ii. 7: “Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?” By which who were called? “Disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” Every body knows that the Christian name is derived in baptism

from the Lord Jesus Christ. But since God is our covenant Father, and Jesus is our covenant God and Saviour, the propriety of saying that we receive that holy name derived from Christ our Lord God in and by the fact of regeneration, is too manifest to need more than a simple statement to make it visible.—How does a child obtain its father’s name but by being born to him?

5. The Church, the body of Christ, is also called the household of faith, and the family and kingdom of God. “The children of the kingdom” are the children of God, and the members of the Church of Christ. The Church is a spiritual kingdom, the children and subjects of which are spiritually such, produced from the natural state by a spiritual process. Regeneration is therefore that which constitutes and confers Church membership in the household of faith, and makes us inheritors by a conditional promise—(not possessors by present occupancy)—of the kingdom of God in heaven. The child by adoption under pupilage and tuition is an heir under promise in expectation of “the purchased possession” when his warfare in the flesh is completed.

6. Children spring from both a father and a mother. God is the Father of those who are “born of water and of the Spirit,” and the Church is their mother. St. Paul tells the Galatians that the Church is the mother of us all, and that we are children of the free woman. Isaiah saith to the Church: “Thy Maker is thy husband;” and St. John tells us of the bride, the Lamb’s wife. Christ is the head of the Church; and as Eve came out of Adam’s side, so the Church springs out of Christ. Eve, though she came out of Adam, yet was the mother of all Adam’s posterity, good and bad: and the Church, though sprung out of Christ, yet is she the Mother of all God’s covenant children even of the rebellious. “I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.” Isa. i. 2. Yet the modern notions of regeneration make that assertion an utter falsehood; for they maintain that these children of God were not born of God.—As Christ was begotten by the Holy Ghost, so the children of the Church are born of “the same Spirit.” Paul, in Eph. v. compares at large the connection between Christ and the Church to the marriage state between man and woman, and calls all Christians members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones without exception or limitation: and in 1 Cor. vi. 15, he says: “Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them the members of an harlot?”—But how the spouse of Christ can be our mother—the mother of us all, without spiritual regeneration, no man has ever informed us, and we think never will. And it must be borne in mind, that men can no more be Christians by the force of mere solitary sentiment, in defiance of the ordinances of the Church of Christ, than they can be married people by the same means in defiance of lawful matrimony: and to claim to be followers of Christ on such loose grounds is about as reasonable and proper as to claim to be married people without the use or intervention of the act of marriage. Yet how many presumptuously set their feet on the ordinances of the Church of God, and rail at those who use them in his fear, as the appointed and indispensable means of grace and instruments of salvation!

7. Our Lord has taken the natural birth as an explanation of regeneration. This is in accordance with his custom of explaining a mystery by a thing with which our minds are familiar. This leads us to look for some analogical likeness between the thing to be explained and that which is given to explain it. Thus, the kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed sown in the ground. Why? Because the word of truth conveys new principles of action into the heart and mind, which when acted on, spread through the moral man, and gradually change his modes of thinking and feeling, and doing, till he resembles “the mind that was in Christ.” The idea of a birth is inseparable from the idea of a mother. She to whom it is said, Thy Maker is thy husband, proves to be the mother of all the members of Christ’s body: and these members are those who are baptized into Christ, and are clothed upon with his holy name and profession as his enlisted followers. The relative circumstances of the spiritual mother are analogous to those of the natural mother. The natural mother is covenanted to her husband: the spiritual mother is covenanted to Christ. It is the part of the natural mother to bear children to her husband, and