

## THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL.

THREE RIVERS, FRIDAY 25th MARCH, 1831.

## AN INQUIRY INTO THE DOCTRINE OF BAPTISMAL REGENERATION.—No. VIII.

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

1. There are many specious objections raised against this doctrine, and much Scripture is pressed into their service. But no objections can neutralize the vast body of Scripture proof adduced without dividing the Bible against itself. It is true that St. John declares that he that is born of God cannot sin. Understand this literally, and it contradicts the whole Bible. Set it against Baptismal Regeneration, and it grapples with the many unqualified assertions of St. Paul, which involve a clear recognition of the doctrine—assertions made indiscriminately of the whole nominal Church. If it is claimed that John meant regeneration independently of the visible Church and ordinances; we reply, that it may also be claimed that it is impossible for the regenerate to sin. Point out one man who cannot sin, or who sinneth not, and we will admit this passage with the others in the same epistle, into the argument. Till that be done, they must be allowed to remain a trial.

2. The Jews averred that God was their Father; but our Lord replied, that if they were, they would love himself; and he added, that the devil was their father. In one sense, their assertion was literally true; because they were God's covenant children and chosen people,—“the children of the kingdom,” for the Jewish Church was the kingdom of God till after Christ. The Old Testament is so full of expressions warranting the assertion of the Jews as regarded their covenant sonship and adoption, or regeneration into God's chosen family, that we need not wonder at it. Our Lord's remarks thereon are perfectly reconcilable with the fact of their covenant regeneration and adoption; if we take into account God's custom of speaking to his people Israel, calling them cursed, revolting, and rebellious children, and a seed of evil doers, at the same time that he used epithets of tenderness towards them, like a good parent correcting bad children.

3. The opposers of Baptismal Regeneration are guilty of throwing out of the argument *one half* of our Lord's expression to Nicodemus, and arguing as if we were not in the Gospel; namely, the words *born of water*: or, if they refer to them, they claim to understand them *figuratively*, while the words *born of the Spirit* they understand *literally*. This is most evidently “wresting the Scripture:” for the sentence is one simple assertion made concerning one simple thing, that is, being born, and makes water as necessary thereto as the Spirit. The simple assertion has to be split into two, and a mask put on one part, while the remainder is made to wear the natural face they both wore before they were divided. But it is quite as fair to claim that born of water is literal, and born of the Spirit figurative. For illustration: “Except a man be drawn by a cart and a horse, he cannot travel.” This is a plain, a very plain thing, nothing can be plainer. But certain economists wish to banish carts out of the King's highway. At length they discover that a cart and a horse are not intended to be understood: that the cart is an unnecessary appendage, nay, an incumbrance; and finally, that a man cannot travel with a cart and a horse, unless the cart be taken from under him, and the horse drags him along without it;—or that, to be drawn by the cart and the horse, he must get out of the cart and ride the horse; or perhaps that by the cart he is only drawn *figuratively*, but by the horse *literally*. At all events, the cart must be dispensed with, and no matter how.

4. To keep in countenance this perversion of one of the plainest assertions of Scripture, it is claimed that the phrase “kingdom of God,” with which it is connected, means *heaven*; and then the word *see* is thus expounded: “Except a man be *baptised*, he cannot *see* the visible Church.” But it is sufficiently evident, that,

whatever *see* may mean, its sense is equivalent to *enter into*, which presently follows it. For illustration: “He that keepeth my word shall never *see* death:”—“*see* corruption:”—“*see* not corruption,”—with others of like kind. On these we might foolishly quibble for half a page; but yet it is plain enough that the true sense of *see* in these passages is, to *experience*. But can any one *experience* the visible Church in his own person without baptism? If he can, of what advantage is that ordinance? Why did Peter promise the gift of the Holy Spirit to none but such as are baptised? We know that it is objected, that the Holy Spirit fell on unbaptised persons. True, but it was for *miraculous evidence*, and not for the purpose set forth by Peter on the day of Pentecost. For if it was, why did Peter so preach, and why were those persons on whom the Spirit fell commanded to be baptised? There is but one solution of the question, namely: baptism is regeneration, or the adoption of sons, or entrance into God's covenant made with Abraham, or the constituting of Church membership and union with Christ's body; and the promise spoken of by Peter is the promise of *covenant grace*, to enable *covenant children* to live to their *covenant God*, under his moral government the Church; which at all times they may have by diligent prayer.

5. There are numerous passages where the phrase, *kingdom of God*, cannot be understood of *heaven*. One example may suffice. “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom, all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire.” Matt. xiii. 41, 42. *Heaven* cannot need such a purgation. In many passages of Scripture, the phrase, *kingdom of God*, is barely equivalent to such as these: Church of Christ; body of Christ; commonwealth of Israel; household of faith; house of God, &c.

6. Dr. Scott is thus brought forward: “They are ‘born of God,’ according to his purpose, by an immediate operation of his Holy Spirit, producing in them a divine life, a new nature, renewing them in the image of God, and inclining them to choose and delight in the spiritual excellency of the things of God.” Here observe the words, “according to his purpose,” serve only to mistify and obscure. According to what or which purpose? Is or is not *baptism* one of God's purposes? Is its object spiritual? But the Doctor appears either to be talking of an *instantaneous birth* which is to occupy a man's *whole life*, or of a *gradual progress* under a renewing process, performed “by an *immediate operation*.”

7. The Church is reproached with—“REGENERATION BY THE WILL OF MAN.” But has human agency, or human will, ever been employed in the work of salvation, or been at all instrumental in conferring any spiritual blessing? St. Paul tells us, Rom. iv. 11, that Abraham received circumcision, the seal of the righteousness of faith. Was this God's seal or Abraham's? Did not God give it to him as the visible token and seal to the covenant made with him and the Church after him? Paul argues that Christians are children of Abraham by the same covenant. But the seal of circumcision was God's gift to Abraham, as a token of assurance of the covenant; therefore it was the seal of the Holy Ghost, whereby Abraham was “sealed unto the day of redemption.” Eph. iv. 30. But by *whose hands* was this seal of faith administered? Did not Abraham circumcise himself? Yes; and it is generally agreed that baptism succeeded in place of circumcision, as the means of adding new members to the Church. Baptism is then the seal of God, to assure every baptised person that he is in covenant with his Maker, a member of Christ, and a part of his Church; and that in true faith he may rest secure of eternal life after he has done serving God in this world. But by *whose hands* was baptism appointed to be done? By whom were converts *baptised into Jesus Christ*, and sealed with the seal of the Holy Ghost? Are we yet to learn that what is done by God's ministry is the same as if done by the hands of Christ?

8. In 2 Cor. xi. 2. Paul saith: “I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin unto Christ.” If then the ministry is competent to such an act, is it too much to say that they administer the seal of the Holy Ghost in Baptism, and thus confirm the promise made to the fathers to the different members of Christ's body? Can they, as ambassadors for Christ, execute the espousals between Him and individual persons without administering the seal of the Holy Spirit, and grafting members