

## THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL.

THREE-RIVERS, FRIDAY 4th MARCH, 1831.

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

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

1. Admission to privileges is not their improvement; neither is state and condition in regard to external circumstances and means of grace one and the same with moral culture resulting from discipline under that state. The simple fact of the natural birth by no means secures the attainment of manhood; neither does the simple fact of the new birth or regeneration secure the perfection of Christian manhood. The first in either case may be without the last: but the last can never be without the first. A man cannot grow up in him who is the head, unless he has first been baptized into Christ and put on Christ: he cannot grow up a child of God unless he be regenerate and born of God. It is one thing to enter into a covenant, and another thing to keep that covenant, or even to wish and try to keep it. The Bible speaks of God's children, even as accursed. “I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.” The parable of the unfruitful fig tree is precisely in point. How came it in the garden of the Lord? By nature? No surely, but by a gracious transplantation into that good ground. “What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?” —“For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.” Is regeneration necessary under the Gospel in order to make men good and religious? Is it the gift of God through Jesus Christ? None disputes either. How then could God address an unregenerate person who had the Bible in his hands and say: “What could have been done more to thee that I have not done in thee?”

2. Take another equally strong position from our Lord's parable in the fifteenth of John. He is the vine; his followers are the branches. These he divides into two classes; the fruitful, and the unfruitful. The branch that beareth is made to bear more: that which remains unfruitful, is cut off, cast into the fire and burned. This precisely agrees with the quotation just made from the fifth of Isaiah. But since the Church is the body of Christ, and Church members the members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones; and since there is but ONE BAPTISM by which to be baptised into Jesus Christ: the parable of Christ the vine is the same in substance with St. Paul's lively descriptions of the Church. But the branches of the vine, be it remarked, are all grafts, taken from the wild olive which is by nature, and can bear nothing of itself but the fruits of perdition, and are grafted into the true vine, that they may thence draw the sap of life eternal. In this sense the fruitful and the unfruitful are on a perfect equality. They are both in the same sense members of Christ and the Church, and made such for the same special end. They are both equally real branches, really grafted into Jesus Christ, and made members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones. If one is regenerate, so is the other. If one is a child of God, so is the other. If one is made an heir of glory, so is the other. If one is chosen and elected, so is the other. If one has the adoption of sons, so has the other. If one is the enlisted soldier of the Cross, so is the other. If one is required to be faithful to him that hath called him, so is the other. If one is born of water and the Spirit, so is the other. If one is taken out of a state of nature into a state of grace, so is the other. If one is made a citizen of the commonwealth of Israel, so is the other. If one is “made nigh by the blood of Christ,” so is the other. If one has entered into the kingdom of God, so has the other. If one has received power to bear fruits unto holiness, so has the other; else, why is he to be cut off the vine Christ for unfruitfulness? God is not a liar nor a hypocrite nor a hard master: he gathers nothing

—he calls for nothing where he has not sown seed in abundance, and sent the showers of his grace to make it fruitful.—In short, this case is so strong for the actual spiritual regeneration of the unfruitful branches, that to deny it to them is to deny it to those that are most fruitful.—How can men be equally accountable to God unless admitted to equal privileges?

It should be borne in mind, that our present business is not with those who never heard the Gospel, but with the visible Church under the Gospel ordinances. If any of the heathen are saved, they are saved without ordinances; and indeed to their justification and sanctification, ordinances are unnecessary: ordinances are only found where the word is preached, with a ministry to administer them. God will call none to account for neglecting what they cannot obtain.

3. Regeneration may be illustrated by the naturalization of an alien and foreigner under a human Government: and this is in strict propriety with the idea of the Church as the kingdom of God, and with a great deal of Scripture language. For instance out of many. “Now therefore ye are no more foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” Eph. ii. 19. A man naturalized is, politically, a new man; but this newness immediately consequent on his naturalization by no means determines that he is a good subject; and yet this he cannot be without it. No more is a man an old experienced servant of God the moment he enters the state of sonship and adoption. He is taken into it to be perfected under it; and nearly one half of the New Testament is addressed to us in language purely applicable to a state of growth from spiritual infancy in the arms of our mother the Church towards a state of maturity under her guidance and teaching. A quotation from Col. iii. 9—12 may serve as a specimen: “Lie not one to another, seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all and in all. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness long suffering.” Mark this language. These holy and beloved elect of God must still put on so many graces: and why? Because they had put on the new man: in other words; being made sons by adoption, they must be “followers of God as dear children.” Having obtained a citizenship in the kingdom, they must learn to be good subjects.

4. This view of the subject takes things in their natural order—begins the Christian life under the Government and ordinances of the Church with the natural life, and keeps the two walking hand in hand throughout the earthly sojourn.

5. The Church or kingdom of God is something visible, a thing which we can see and know by the outward senses, or we could not know that we belong to it, could never be assured of Church membership, and by consequence never could know that we are children of God's family. Hence by parity of reasoning, the means of connection with, or the act of introduction into that kingdom, and naturalization under the moral Government of God; namely, the Church—in other words, that our regeneration should possess as distinguishable marks, and as cognizable by the outward senses, as the Church herself, or we never could know the fact of our membership with more certainty than we could if we had no means of knowing the Church. In short, baptism into Jesus Christ is the grand mark by which the Church is known collectively, and so individually, (as there cannot be a collection without individuals),—which points it out as the mark in question. It is the seal of promise to each individual member; the infallible mark of his being regenerate and born again, born into the family of God, and made a member of Christ; the seal of the Holy Ghost to his adoption. And that this language is not too strong, see Paul in Eph. i. 13, 14: “In whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession.” After that ye believed, ye were sealed. Adults at that time, with their whole houses, were baptized as soon as they believed; and thus, (iv. 30) “sealed unto the day of redemption” with the seal of God by the Holy Spirit of promise, as a mark of assurance of the good will of God in thus conferring on them the adoption of