

THE DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM.—No. 2.

AFTER having plainly stated the doctrine of Christian Baptism, as grounded upon the Holy Scriptures, it is necessary now to consider some prevailing mistakes and popular objections.

1. Some think a great deal more about the time when they joined themselves to some sect than when they were joined to the Church of Christ by means of the divinely instituted sacrament of Baptism. They never consider that our Saviour has instituted Baptism to be the true bond of union and of Church membership amongst all his disciples throughout the whole world. They have lost sight of this sacrament of Christ. They think that at best it is a mere form and a barren ceremony. But since Baptism is a *divinely instituted* means of grace, they who deny or overlook its use and power and virtue, need to be instructed again in the first principles of the Christian Religion.

2. Others say that the new birth and conversion mean the same thing; and into this mistake they fall through overlooking the word *water* in our Saviour's express declaration about the new birth. They always *carefully exclude that word*, or else explain it away in an unlawful manner. According to these people, it would seem that our Lord used the word *water* by accident, that it has no real meaning in the matter, that it is quite useless. But this we dare not think for a moment. Our Lord most solemnly and distinctly says that *two* means are necessary to our New Birth, viz., *Water and the Spirit*. Who of us shall dare to say that the *water* is needless. Neither let us confound together the *two* distinct doctrines of the new birth and conversion. They are two separate and distinct truths. The new birth is "of water and of the Spirit," and therefore cannot in ordinary cases take place at any other time than at our Baptism. But after Baptism a person may fall into sin, or he may spend many years in carelessness or ungodliness: if so, he needs to be *converted*, that is, turned from his bad ways to the paths of religion; and this is the case with nearly all of us, for we all have some sin or other which we need to forsake. Still, this conversion is not

the new birth, and must not be confounded with it. Perhaps we shall best understand the difference by remembering that our regeneration is *change of state*, that is, a taking us from the state of original sin, and consequent wrath of God, in which we are placed by our natural birth as the offspring of Adam, and placing us in a state of grace, when by the merits of our Lord we are made "members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven;" and on the other hand, *that our conversion from sin is a change of heart*, when we turn from sins which we have committed, and desire to make our peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Our regeneration can take place but once; but conversion must take place as often as we unhappily fall into sin.

3. Some say, what good can pouring a little water on any one do? Surely that cannot change his spiritual condition! But when people talk in this way does it not show that they are ignorant of the nature of a sacrament? This is to be like Naaman who scorned the little stream of Israel appointed for his cleansing. This is to undervalue the institution of God. In the case of Naaman the cleansing came from God, not from the river Jordan, yet, until he washed in that river, God would not cleanse him. So it is in this sacrament. The outward part is common and lowly, but the inward part is of the power of God. What God has joined together in a sacrament of His institution, man must not put asunder. Let us not despise the simplicity and lowliness of the outward part of the sacrament.

4. Others object that it is very dangerous to tell ungodly men that they were born again in their baptism. But why is it dangerous to tell them so, if you tell them at the same time, as you ought to do, that the divine gift of their new birth lays upon them infinite responsibilities, which if they neglect, they will be lost? Why is it so dangerous, if you tell the ungodly man that unless he is converted he must perish under the heaviest of all condemnations? Besides, the question is, is the doctrine true? If true, (and we shewed it to be so in our last paper,) it must be taught: the result is in the hand of God.