

and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's."

4. Another inquiry connected with this rite is, who are the proper subjects of it, or to whom ought it to be administered? On the points previously touched upon there has been, and is, an almost entire conformity of opinion; but on this point, who are the proper subjects of this ordinance, there has been much controversy in the christian church. I shall here state not in the form or spirit of a polemic, but with the plainness and simplicity of a christian teacher, what seems to be the doctrine of scripture on this head.

Observe then that we do not find any where in scripture any fixed rule laid down to enable us to determine the age, the attainments, the character, of those who should be admitted to this christian ordinance. The words of the institution are very general. The following translation is more literal, and does not vary in sense from the authorized version. "Proceeding forth make ye disciples of all nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and by teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." The injunction is to make disciples of all nations, this is to be done by baptizing them; and this baptism is to be followed up with a full course of instruction regarding every thing which Christ has commanded. With respect to adults it is quite obvious, that there is no mode of making them disciples but by a previous course of instruction sufficient to make them acquainted with the nature of this ordinance and the claims of the gospel upon their belief. The plan which the Jesuit missionaries followed of passing through extensive countries and sprinkling water in the name of the Trinity over multitudes at once, without any previous or even subsequent instruction, was as repugnant to common sense as to scriptural precedent. Such a practice could not by any possibility make christian disciples. For this cannot be done otherwise than by instructing them who Christ is and what he hath taught. This plan, we have every reason to believe the apostles and primitive missionaries uniformly observed. They instructed their catechumens in some short summary of christian doctrine, which so soon as they fully understood and embraced, they were admitted by baptism to a full standing in the church, and to a free participation in all its privileges. In this manner the Ethiopian prince was baptized after Philip had preached Jesus to him. So Cornelius and his household were baptized after Peter had discoursed to them of the death and resurrection

of Christ; and the Philippian jailer, after Paul and Silas had spoken to him the word of the Lord, and had solved his question, "What must I do to be saved?" was baptized, he and all his straightway." Nor can there be any doubt that this was the uniform practice of the church in regard to adults converted from heathenism to the christian faith. They were previously instructed before they were baptized, and it was not until they obtained a competent knowledge and belief of the leading articles of the gospel, that they were admitted into the church by this initiatory rite, and were numbered among the professed disciples of the Lord Jesus. We reach then this conclusion that persons arrived at years of understanding were not admitted into the church by baptism until they were instructed, and professed their faith in him. Up to this point the whole christian church is agreed on the question, who are proper subjects of baptism? In regard to the condition on which this rite should be administered to adults, the Anabaptist and the Paedobaptist are of the same sentiment, and thus far their interpretation of the will of their common Saviour harmonizes.

But then there is an onward position which the Paedobaptist has attained on which his fellow christian, the Anabaptist, cannot follow him; and that is, the admission of infants and children into the christian church by baptism. The grounds on which the Anabaptist refuses to assent to this practice, are chiefly these:—That as infants and children cannot be taught, they cannot in strict propriety, become disciples, nor participate in the fellowship of saints; they can neither believe nor profess belief; and therefore they ought not, it is alledged, be admitted to a community wherein such belief and profession are the conditions of fellowship. In order to exhibit what we deem the insufficiency of these grounds for the exclusion of infants from this initiatory ordinance, let us observe, that at this day infant baptism is administered among every considerable division of the christian church, as an ordinance having the implied sanction, as is believed, of its divine Head. Following the history of the church backward from the present day, until the time of the apostles, it cannot be determined that there is any period in which this practice did not prevail, while there is very satisfactory evidence that it has prevailed even from apostolic times. Again we think this practice has both a direct and indirect sanction in the scripture histories. The practice is nowhere expressly forbidden. It is not at variance with the words of the institution; for those who observe it, resolve to make disciples of the young by baptizing and instructing—each as the child is