

THE DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM.—No. 1.

AS a Sacrament is a *Divine Institution*, we cannot for a moment suppose that it is only a form or a ceremony. Far from us be the thought that our Lord God should have instituted in His Church a mere outward sign and a barren ceremony. Rather let us believe that every Divinely instituted ordinance is intended to convey to us the grace of God.

To learn, then, what is the nature of the inward and spiritual grace of Holy Baptism, let us now consider the chief passages in the New Testament which relate to it.

The sum and substance of the whole doctrine of Christian Baptism is contained in St. John iii., 5: "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Let us consider these words of our Saviour with great care. Let us keep very close to His express words, and to those ideas which they plainly suggest to our minds. Our Lord declares (1) that there is a *kingdom of God*, (2) that our entrance into this kingdom is by a *new birth*; and (3) that this new birth is of *water and of the Spirit*. Nothing can be of greater importance to us all than these truths.

First of all, our Saviour teaches us that there is a kingdom of God on earth; that is, that there is a visible society on earth, formed by our Lord Jesus Christ, to do God's work in the salvation of mankind. This is the body which we call the Christian Church. This is the great Dispensation of the Messiah, for which preparation had been made from the beginning.

Next, our Lord declares that our entrance into this kingdom of God is by a *new birth*. We enter into natural life at our first birth; but we must be *born again*; a second birth is necessary for us, in order to our entrance into the kingdom of God. Let us attend to what our Blessed Saviour has revealed to us about it.

Our new birth, He says, is "of water and of the Spirit." By these words we learn that our new birth is given us by the Holy Spirit of God; and then, also, because our Lord

says that it is "of water" as well as "of the Spirit," we learn that our new birth is granted us by the Holy Spirit in the *Sacrament of Baptism*, for this very plain reason, that *then only* has our Saviour commanded *water* to be used. If our new birth, or regeneration, took place at some other time when *water* is not used, how could it be said with any propriety that we were born again "of water and of the Spirit?" We must keep close to our Saviour's words. By *water* He means *water*; and that word must direct our thoughts to the Sacrament of Baptism, for on that occasion only has He commanded *water* to be used.

There can be very little doubt that the Church of England, in common with the Christian Church everywhere, understands these words of our Lord as relating to the Sacrament of Baptism. Her voice is clear and decided about this matter, as any person may easily see by reading the Office for Adult Baptism. In that Office the Gospel appointed to be read is the very passage containing our Saviour's discourse with Nicodemus. And the exhortation founded on that Gospel begins as follows: "Beloved, ye hear in this Gospel the express words of our Saviour Christ, that, 'Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God!' Whereby ye may perceive the great necessity of this Sacrament, where it may be had." The exhortation says that from our Saviour's express words we may perceive the great necessity of the Sacrament of Baptism. For in that most solemn declaration, of such infinite importance to all men, our Lord would never have spoken one single useless word. By saying therefore that our new birth is "of water and of the Spirit," we must of necessity conclude that, in all ordinary cases, our new birth is given to us by the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Baptism. No doctrine of Divine Revelation can be more express and certain than this.

A new birth suggests to our minds at once that we are made children of a new family, members of a new man. By our first birth we enter into the natural family of Adam, or are made members of the first man. In like