

earth. The phrases, "the kingdom of God," and "the kingdom of heaven," are, however, more frequently used by our Lord to denote the church in this present world, than in its state of glory; and since all the children brought to Christ to receive his blessing were not likely to die in their infancy, it could not be affirmed that "of such is the kingdom of heaven," if that be understood to mean the state of future happiness exclusively. As children they might be all members of the church on earth; but not all *as children*, members of the church in heaven, seeing they might live to become adult, and be cast away. Thus therefore, if children are expressly declared to be members of Christ's church, then are they proper subjects of baptism, which is the initiatory rite into every portion of that church which is visible.

But let this case be more particularly considered.

Take it that by "the kingdom of God," or "of heaven," our Lord means the glorified state of his church; it must be granted that none can enter into heaven who are not redeemed by Christ, and who do not stand in a vital relation to him as members of his mystical body, or otherwise we should place human and fallen beings in that heavenly state who are unconnected with Christ as their Redeemer, and uncleansed by him as the Sanctifier of his redeemed. Now this relation must exist on earth before it can exist in heaven; or else we assign the work of sanctifying the fallen nature of man to a future state, which is contrary to the Scriptures. If infants, therefore, are thus redeemed and sanctified in their nature, and are before death made "meet for the inheritance of the saints in light," so that in this world they are placed in the same relation to Christ as an adult believer, who derives sanctifying influence from him, they are therefore the members of his church,—they partake the grace of the covenant, and are comprehended in that promise of the covenant, "I will be to them a God, and they will be to me a people." In other words they are made members of Christ's church, and are entitled to be recognized as such by the administration of the visible sign of initiation into some visible branch of it. If it be asked, "Of what import then is baptism to children, if as infants they already stand in a favourable relation to Christ?" the answer is, that it is of the same import as circumcision was to Abraham, which was "a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised;" it confirmed all the promises of the covenant of grace to him, and made the church of God visible to men. It is of the same import as baptism to the eunuch who had faith already, and a willingness to submit to the rite before it was administered to him. He stood at that moment in the condition, not of a *candidate* for introduction into the church, but of an *accepted* candidate; he was virtually a member, although not *formally* so, and his baptism was not merely a sign of his faith, but a *confirming* sign of God's covenant relation to him as a pardoned and accepted man, and gave him a security for the continuance and increase of the grace of the covenant, as he was prepared to receive it. In like manner, in the

case of all truly believing adults applying for baptism, their relation to Christ is not that of mere candidates for membership with his church, but that of *accepted* candidates, standing already in a vital relation to him, but about to receive the seal which was to confirm that grace, and its increase in the ordinance itself, and in future time. Thus this *previous* relation of infants to Christ, as accepted by him, is an argument for their baptism, not against it, seeing it is by that they are visibly recognized as the formal members of his church, and have the full grace of the covenant confirmed and sealed to them, with increase of *grace* as they are fitted to receive it, beside the advantage of visible connection with the church, and of that obligation which is taken upon themselves by their parents to train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

In both views, then, "of such is the kingdom of God,"—members of his church on earth, and of his church in heaven, if they die in infancy, for the one is necessarily involved in the other. No one can be of the kingdom of God in heaven who does not stand in a vital sanctifying relation to Christ as the head of his mystical body, the church on earth; and no one can be of the kingdom of God on earth, a member of his true church, and die in that relation, without entering that state of glory to which his adoption on earth makes him an heir through Christ.

4. The argument from apostolic practice next offers itself. That practice was to baptize the houses of them that believed.

The impugners of Christian baptism are pleased to argue much from the absence of all express mention of the baptism of infants in the New Testament. This however is easily accounted for, when it is considered that if, as we have proved, baptism has taken the place of circumcision, the baptism of infants was so much a matter of course as to call for no remark. The argument from silence on this subject is one which least of all the Baptists ought to dwell upon, since, as we have seen, if it had been intended to exclude children from the privilege of being placed in covenant with God, which privilege they unquestionably enjoy under the Old Testament, this extraordinary alteration, which could not but produce remark, required to be particularly noted, both to account for it to the mind of an affectionate Jewish parent, and to guard against that mistake into which we shall just now show Christians from the earliest times fell, since they administered baptism to infants. It may farther be observed that, as to the Acts of the Apostles, the events narrated there did not require the express mention of the baptism of infants, as an act separate from the baptism of adults. That which called for the administration of baptism at that period, as now, when the Gospel is preached in a heathen land, was the believing of adult persons, not the case of persons already believing bringing their children for baptism. On the supposition that baptism was administered to the children of the parents who thus believed, at the same time as themselves, and in consequence of their believing, it may be asked how the fact could be more