

## Theological.

THE NATURAL SUBJECTS, AND MODE  
OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM.

(Continued from page 379.)

But the Apostle does not rest in this general representation. He proceeds to express, in a particular and most forcible manner, the nature of Christian baptism,—“not the putting away of the filth of the flesh; but the answer of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Now, whether we take the word, rendered in our translation “an answer,” for a demand, or requirement; or for the answer to a question or questions; or in the sense of a stipulation; the general import of the passage is nearly the same. If the first, then it is a demand of the Spirit, that I should put away the filth of the flesh, not a mere ceremonial rite; but a rite which demands, or requires, something of us beyond itself, as a condition of our being saved. What, that is, we learn from the words of our Lord; it is faith in Christ; “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;” which faith is the reliance of a penitent upon the atonement of the Saviour, who thus subdues with all gentleness and truth to the terms of the evangelical covenant. If we take the second sense, we must lay aside the notion of some theologians and commentators, who think that there is an allusion to the ancient practice of demanding of the candidates for baptism, whether they renounced their sins, and the service of Satan, with other questions of the same import, for, ancient as this question may be, they are probably not so ancient as the time of the Apostle. We know, however, from the instance of Philip and the eunuch that there was an explicit requirement of faith, and as explicit an answer or confession: “And Philip said, If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest; and he answered, I believe that Jesus is the Son of God.” Every administration of baptism indeed implied this demand; and baptism, if we understand St. Peter to refer to this circumstance, was such an “answer” to the interrogations of the administrator as expressed a true and evangelical faith. If we take the third rendering of “stipulation,” which has less to support it critically than either of the others, still, as the profession of faith was a condition of baptism, that profession had the full force of a formal stipulation, since all true faith in Christ requires an entire subjection to him as Lord as well as Saviour.

Upon this passage, however, somewhat clearer light may be thrown by understanding the word in the same sense of that which *asks, requires, seeks,* something beyond itself. The verb from which it is derived signifies to ask or require; but it occurs nowhere else in the New Testament; and but once in the version of the Seventy, Dan. iv. 17. where, however it is used so as to be fully illustrative of the meaning of St. Peter. Belshazzar was to be humbled by being driven from men to associate with the beasts of the field; and the vision in which this was represented concludes, “This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand, by the word

of the Holy Ones, to the intent that the living may know, that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men.”

The Chaldee word, like the Greek, is from a word which signifies to ask, to require, and may be equally expressed by the word *ἵκετο*, which is the rendering of the Vulgate, or by *postulation*. There was an end, or “intent,” for which the branding of the Babylonian King was required “by the word of the Holy One,” that by the signal punishment of the greatest earthly monarch, “the living might know that the Most High ruleth in the Kingdom of men.” In like manner baptism has an end, an “intent,” “not the putting away the filth of the flesh,” but obtaining “a good conscience toward God;” and it *requires, claims,* this good conscience through the faith in Christ whom all men are sinners of sins, the cleansing of the “conscience from dead works,” and these supplies of supernatural ability which, to a future, may “live in righteousness before God.” It is thus that we see how St. Peter preserves the correspondence between the act of Noah in preparing the ark as an act of faith by which he was justified, and the act of submitting to Christian baptism, which is too obviously an act of faith, in order to the remission of sins, or the obtaining of a good conscience before God. This is further strengthened by his immediately adding, “by the resurrection of Jesus Christ;” a clause which our translators by the use of a parenthesis connect with “by which he also now saves us;” so that their meaning is, we are saved by baptism through the resurrection of Jesus Christ; and as he “rose again for our justification,” this sufficiently shows the true sense of the Apostle, who, by our being “saved,” clearly means our being justified by faith.

The text however needs no parenthesis, and the true sense may be thus expressed: “The antitype to which water of the flood, baptism, doth now save us; not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but that which intently seeks a good conscience toward God, through faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” But, however a particular word may be disposed of, the whole passage can only be consistently taken to teach us that baptism is the outward sign of our entrance into God’s covenant of mercy; and that when it is an act of true faith, it becomes an instrument of salvation, like that act of faith in Noah, by which, when moved with fear, he “prepared an ark to the saving of his house;” and survived the destruction of an unbelieving world.

From what has been said it will then follow that the Abrahamic covenant and the Christian covenant is the same gracious engagement on the part of God to show mercy to man, and to bestow upon him eternal life through faith in Christ as the true sacrifice for sin, differing only in circumstances; and that as the sign and seal of this covenant under the old dispensation was circumcision, under the new it is baptism, which has the same federal character, performs the same initiatory office, and is instituted by the same authority. For none could have authority to lay aside the appointed seal, but the Being who first

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