

THE DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM.—3.

IN our last paper we briefly noticed several objections made to the Scripture doctrine of baptism. We now proceed to mention other contrary views which are occasionally advanced against this great fundamental truth.

6. Some persons urge that it is very difficult to believe that we are born again in our baptism, because we see so many who are baptized grow up and live careless and ungodly lives. And this is felt to be a great difficulty with many serious people. But we should remember that we ought to expect that difficulties will arise in the mysteries of the faith, and that if we refuse to believe a doctrine until we can clear up all difficulties about it, we must give up many doctrines of the Christian revelation. The difficulty must not be set against the express words of our Saviour, which say that our entrance into His kingdom is by a new birth, and that new birth is "of water and of the Spirit," which must refer to the Sacrament of Baptism. Our Lord's words were express, and our difficulty merely arises from our own partial knowledge of Divine truths. Consider, the sowing of good seed does not of necessity imply the gathering of a good harvest; nor does the being born into this world necessarily imply that we must live and grow up to manhood. And just in the same way our new birth into the kingdom of God does not necessarily imply that the end of that new birth must be attained, or that we cannot fail to grow up into Him in all things Who is the Head: for just as our natural life is tender, and very often fails at its beginning, even so is our spiritual life. The Holy Spirit, we know, may be grieved, and vexed, and resisted, and may leave us, so that no good fruit of our new birth remains.

7. Again, it is often objected that baptism is not necessary to salvation, because St. Paul said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." It is said by some that salvation is promised on condition of faith only. But surely this is greatly to misunderstand the words of St. Paul. He was speaking to a heathen, and told him to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and so he should find salvation.

But he did not say that salvation could be obtained without the use of those means and instruments which the Saviour Himself had appointed, but only in the use of them. And as a matter of fact, the very man to whom St. Paul addressed these words, "was baptized, he and all his house, straightway," which makes it reasonable to suppose that the Apostle in "speaking to him the word of the Lord," must have explained to him at the very outset the absolute necessity of baptism as being a positive institution of God. An objection based upon St. Paul's words could only be made by one who separated the words from what follows.

8. A difficulty arises from some passages of Scripture which we ought not to overlook. It is written, "Being born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever:" and "In Jesus Christ have I begotten you, through the Gospel." Hence some have been led to think that our new birth is rather by the Word of God than in Holy Baptism. But we should consider that *several means* often concur to *one end*. Take a familiar illustration. A man holds out a pole to a drowning man, he grasps it, and is saved. Now the question might be asked, "What saved him?" and many *different* answers might be given, and yet all of them true. The *pole* saved him, or the man's *strength* in laying hold of it, or the *man* who held the pole out to him, or the man's *compassion* in going to his help, or *his* strength who helped, and so on. The truth is, that in most actions several means concur to one end. And we may often distinguish between the *remote* and the *direct* means. In the case of the heathen, to whom is preached the Word of God, conversion, repentance, and faith are all necessary before baptism. All are means, more or less remote, by which the heathen are brought to their new birth. The difference between these means is accurately shown in the original Greek, though not always in our translation. In the original we are said to be born again "of God," of water and of the Spirit," but "by or through the Word," "through the Gospel." It is not therefore in the same sense that we are said to be born