

Christian Messenger.

A REPOSITORY OF RELIGIOUS, POLITICAL & GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

"Not slothful in business: fervent in spirit."

NEW SERIES,
Vol. IX, No. 33.

HALIFAX, N. S., WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 31, 1864.

WHOLE SERIES,
Vol. XXVIII, No. 33.

Religious.

BAPTISMAL REGENERATION.

BY REV. C. H. SPURGEON.

"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."—MARK 16: 15, 16.

I find that the great error which we have to contend with throughout England (and it is growing more and more), is one in direct opposition to my text, well known to you as the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. We will confront this dogma with the assertion, that BAPTISM WITHOUT FAITH SAVES NO ONE. The text says, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;" but whether a man be baptized or no, it asserts that "he that believeth not shall be damned;" so that baptism does not save the unbeliever—no, it does not in any degree exempt him from the common doom of all the ungodly. He may have baptism, or may not have baptism, but if he believeth not, he shall be in any case most surely damned. Let him be baptized by immersion or sprinkling, in his infancy, or in his adult age, if he be not led to put his trust in Jesus Christ—if he remaineth an unbeliever; then this terrible doom is pronounced upon him—"He that believeth not shall be damned." I am not aware that any Protestant church in England teaches the doctrine of baptismal regeneration except one, and that happens to be the corporation which with none too much humility calls itself the Church of England. This very powerful sect does not teach this doctrine merely through a section of its ministers, who might charitably be considered as evil branches of the vine, but it openly, boldly, and plainly declares this doctrine in her own appointed standard, the Book of Common Prayer, and that in words so express, that while language is the channel of conveying intelligible sense, no process short of violent wrestling from their plain meaning can ever make them say anything else.

Here are the words: we quote them from the Catechism which is intended for the instruction of youth, and is naturally very plain and simple, since it would be foolish to trouble the young with metaphysical refinements. The child is asked his name, and then questioned, "Who gave you this name?" "My godfathers and godmothers in my baptism; wherein I was made a member of Christ, the child of God and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." Is not this definite and plain enough? I prize the words for their candor; they could not speak more plainly. Three times over the thing is put, lest there should be any doubt in it. The word *regeneration* may, by some sort of juggling, be made to mean something else, but here there can be no misunderstanding. The child is not only made a "member of Christ"—union to Jesus is no mean spiritual gift—but he is made in baptism "the child of God" also; and, since the rule is, "if children then heirs, he is also made an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." Nothing can be more plain. I venture to say that while honesty remains on earth the meaning of these words will not admit of dispute. It is as clear as noon-day that, as the Rubric hath it, "Fathers, mothers, masters, and dames, are to cause their children, servants, and apprentices," no matter how idle, giddy, or wicked they may be, to learn the Catechism, and to say that in baptism they were made members of Christ and children of God. The form for the administration of this baptism is scarcely less plain and outspoken, seeing that thanks are expressly returned unto Almighty God, because the person baptized is regenerate. "Then shall the priest say, 'Seeing now dearly beloved brethren, that this child is regenerate and grafted into the body of Christ's church, let us give thanks unto Almighty God for these benefits, and with one accord make our prayers unto him that this child may lead the rest of his life according to this beginning.'" Nor is this all, for to leave no mistake, we have the words of the thanksgiving prescribed, "Then shall the priest say, 'We yield thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate this infant with thy Holy Spirit, to receive him for thine own child by adoption, and to incorporate him into thy holy church.'"

My brethren, these are honest churchmen in this matter who, subscribing to the Prayer Book, believe in baptismal regeneration, and preach it plainly. God forbid that we should censure those who believe that baptism saves the soul, because they adhere to a church which teaches the same doctrine. So far they are honest men; and in England, wherever else, let them never lack a full toleration. Let us oppose their teaching by all scriptural and intelligent means, but let us respect their courage in plainly giving us their views. I hate their doctrine, but I love their honesty; and as they speak but what they believe to be true, let them speak it out, and the more clearly the better. Out with it, sirs, be it what it may, but do let us know what you mean. For my part, I love to stand foot to foot with an honest foe. To open warfare, bold and true hearts raise no objection but the ground of quarrel; it is covert enmity which we have most cause to fear, and best reason to loathe. That crafty kindness which inveigles me to sacrifice principle to the serpent in the grass—deadly to the incautious wayfarer. Where union and friendship are not cemented by truth, they are an unhallowed confederacy. It is time that there should be an end put to the flirtations of honest men with those who believe one way and swear another. If men believe baptism works regeneration let them say so; but if they do not so believe in their hearts, and yet subscribe, and yet more, get their living by subscribing to words asserting it, let them find congenial associates among men who can equivocate and shuffle, for honest men will neither ask nor accept their friendship.

We ourselves are not dubious on this point, we protest that persons are not saved by being baptized. We hold that persons are not saved by baptism, for we think, first of all, that *seems out of character with the spiritual religion which Christ came to teach*, that he should make salvation depend upon mere ceremony. Judaism might possibly absorb the ceremony by way of type into her ordinances, essential to eternal life, for it was a religion of types and shadows. The false religions of the heathen might inculcate salvation by a physical process, but Jesus Christ claims for his faith that it is purely spiritual, and how could he connect regeneration with a peculiar application of aqueous fluid? I cannot see how it would be a spiritual gospel, but I can see how it would be mechanical, if I were sent forth to teach that the mere dropping of so many drops upon the brow, or even the plunging a person in water could save the soul. This seems to me to be the most mechanical religion now existing, and to be on a par with the praying windmills of Thibet, or the climbing up and down of Pilate's staircase, to which Luther subjected himself in the days of his darkness. The operation of water baptism does not appear even to my faith to touch the point involved in the regeneration of the soul. What is the necessary connection between water and the overcoming of sin? I cannot see any connection which can exist between sprinkling or immersion, and regeneration, so that the one shall necessarily be tried to the other in the absence of faith. Used by faith, had God commanded it, miracles might be wrought; but without faith or even consciousness, as in the case of babes, how can spiritual benefits be connected necessarily with the sprinkling of water? If this be your teaching, that regeneration goes with baptism, I say it looks like the teaching of a spurious church, which has craftily invented a mechanical salvation to deceive ignorant, sensual, and grovelling minds, rather than the teaching of the most profound spiritual of all teachers, who rebuked Scribes and Pharisees for regarding outward rites as more important than inward grace.

But it strikes me that a more forcible argument is that *the dogma is not supported by facts*. Are all persons who are baptized children of God? Well, let us look at the divine family! Let us mark their resemblance to their glorious parent! Am I untruthful if I say that thousands of those who are baptized in their infancy are now in our prisons? You can ascertain the fact, if you please, by application to prison authorities. Do you believe that these men, many of whom have been living by plunder, felony, burglary, or forgery, are regenerate? If so, the Lord

deliver us from such regeneration. Are these villainous members of Christ? If so, Christ has sadly altered since the day when he was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners. Has he really taken baptized drunkards and harlots to be members of his body? Do you not revolt at the supposition? It is a well-known fact that baptized persons have been hanged. Surely it can hardly be right to hang the inheritors of the kingdom of heaven! Our sheriffs have much to answer for when they officiate at the execution of the children of God, and suspend the members of Christ on the gallows! What a detestable farce is that which is transacted at the Old Bailey, when a "dear brother" has his neck broken to the music of "a sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life," and the prayer that "when we shall depart this life we may rest in Christ, as our hope is that this our brother doth." Here is a regenerate brother, who is far too vile to live in this world and must be hanged by the neck until dead—but though he is not good enough for the society of sinners, and man rejects him, he is quite prepared to enter into the presence of God, and enters eternity with "a sure and certain hope of a resurrection unto eternal life." If old Rome in her worst days ever perpetrated a grosser piece of imposture than this, I do not read things aright; if it does not require a Luther to cry down this hypocrisy as much as Popery ever did, then I do not even know that twice two make four. Do we find—we who baptize on profession of faith, and baptize by immersion in a way which is confessed to be correct, though not allowed by some to be absolutely necessary to its validity—do we who baptize in the name of the sacred Trinity as others do, do we find that baptism regenerates? We do not. Facts all show that whatever good there may be in baptism, it certainly does not make a man "a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven," or else many thieves, whoremongers, drunkards, fornicators, and murderers, are members of Christ, the children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven. Facts, brethren, are dead against this Popish doctrine; and facts are stubborn things.

I have not done with this point, I must take another case, and suppose the sponsors and others to be *ungodly*, and that is no hard supposition, for in many cases we know that godfathers and parents have no more thought of religion than that idolatrous hollow stone around which they gather. When these sinners have taken their places, what are they about to say? Why, they are about to make the solemn vows I have already recounted in your hearing! Totally irreligious they are, but yet they promise for the baby what they never did, and never thought of doing for themselves—the promise on behalf of this child "that he will renounce the devil and all his works, and constantly believe God's holy Word, and obediently keep his commandments." My brethren do not think I speak severely here. Really I think there is something here to make mockery for devils. Let every honest man lament, that ever God's church should tolerate such a thing as this, and that there should be found gracious people who will feel grieved because I, in all kindness of heart, rebuke the atrocity. Unregenerate sinners promising for a poor babe that he shall keep all God's holy commandments which they themselves wantonly break every day! How can anything but the long-suffering of God endure this? What! not speak against it? The very stones in the street might cry out against the infamy of wicked men and women promising that another should renounce the devil and all his works, while they themselves serve the devil and do his works with greediness! As a climax to all this, I am asked to believe that God accepts that wicked promise, and as the result of it regenerates that child. You cannot believe in regeneration by this operation, whether saints or sinners are the performers. Take them to be godly, then they are wrong for doing what their conscience must condemn; view them as ungodly, and they are wrong for promising what they know they cannot perform; and in neither case can God accept such worship, much less infallibly append regeneration to such a baptism as this.

But you will say, "Why do you cry out against it?" I cry out against it because I

believe that baptism does not save the soul, and that *the preaching of it has a wrong and evil influence upon men*. We meet with persons who, when we tell them that they must be born again, assure us that they were born again when they were baptized. The number of these persons is increasing, fearfully increasing, until all grades of society are misled by this belief. How can any man stand up in his pulpit and say, "Ye must be born again" to his congregation, when he has already assured them, by his own "unfeigned assent and consent" to it, that they are themselves, every one of them, born again in baptism. What is he to do with them? Why, my dear friends, the gospel then has no voice; they have rammed this ceremony down its throat and it cannot speak to rebuke sin. The man who has been baptized or sprinkled, says, "I am saved, I am a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven. Who are you, that you should rebuke me? Call me to repentance? Call me to a new life? What better life can I have? for I am a member of Christ—a part of Christ's body. What! rebuke me? I am a child of God. Cannot you see it in my face? No matter what my walk and conversation is, I am a child of God. Moreover, I am an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven. It is true, I drink, and swear, and all that, but you know I am an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven, for when I die, though I live in constant sin, you will put me in the grave and tell everybody that I died "in sure and certain hope of a blessed resurrection."

Now, what can be the influence of such preaching as this upon our beloved England? Upon my dear and blessed country? What but the worst of ills?

(To be continued.)

"This do in remembrance of me."

THE PROVISION.

"This is my body, which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me." "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you."—LUKE 22: 19, 20.

We come to the Lord's table, to feed on Jesus, on Jesus alone. Not on our doings or sufferings. Not on our vows or professions. No; but on Jesus only. His body is represented by the bread. His body, on which our sins were laid, in which our sins were punished, by the sacrifice of which our sins were put away. His body is the food of our faith. His body is offered to and accepted by God, for the expiation of our offences. He was bruised for our iniquities. He died for our sins. He put away our sins by the sacrifice of himself. His blood is represented by the wine. The blood is the life. He laid down his life for us. He poured out his soul unto death. Nothing will satisfy the thirst of faith but the blood of Jesus. Nothing will quench the fiery law in the heart but the blood of Jesus. Nothing will silence and pacify the sinner's conscience but the blood of Jesus. As hungry, we feed on our Saviour's broken body; as thirsty, we drink his precious blood. Here is a whole Christ—a perfect Saviour. Here is nourishment for the soul, of which, if a man partake, he shall live for ever. If I partake of the elements alone, they do me no good; but if, while partaking of the elements, I partake of Christ by faith, I am strengthened, quickened, and nourished up into everlasting life. Precious, precious Saviour! I will come to thy table, that I may feed on thy flesh and blood, so shall I live for ever. Blessed Spirit, ever reveal, and endear, Jesus to me, when I come to this feast of love. O for heartfelt communion with God, at his own table! "Who-so eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day: for my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." John 6: 54, 55.

"TAKE THIS RULE."—The following excellent advice was given in a letter to John Wesley from his mother: Take this rule: Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off the relish of spiritual things; in short, whatever increases the strength of your body over your mind—that thing is sin to you, however innocent it may be to you in itself.