

## ARTICLE V.

## THE CHARACTER OF INFANTS.

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THERE is scarcely a question in the whole range of Christian Theology, more difficult of solution than that respecting the character of infants. There is scarcely one which has given rise to a greater variety of speculation. And judging from the prominence accorded to it by Ecclesiastical Councils and Ministerial Associations, there is hardly one of greater importance. For whatever else these venerable bodies may choose to pass over in their examination of candidates for the ministry, they almost invariably bring in the subject of infant character. "What is your opinion as to the character of infants?" This question is about as sure to be asked, as an examination in theology is to take place.

Nor do we complain at all of this. The question is not only a proper one, but it is one of very considerable importance, both in itself, and in its relations. Besides; it is, on more accounts than one, a test question; a test of the candidate's opinions on certain connected points; a test also of his ability to unravel theological difficulties, and untie hard knots.

In what follows, it is proposed carefully to consider this question; to examine some of the theories which have been proposed respecting it; and to set forth what is conceived to be the truth of the case.

The theories of infant character now before the public naturally divide themselves into two classes; the one regarding the infant as *innocent*, the other holding him to be a *sinner*. We know not that any Christians have said that infants, at the first, were positively *holy*. Pelagius himself would not have said as much as this. But there are those who hold that they are negatively *innocent*, they have no sin; and this because they are not moral agents, and have no moral character at all.

Of those who take this ground, there are two distinct classes; the *Pelagian* and the *Evangelical*. The Pelagian tells us that the infant has inherited no corruption from Adam, of any kind; that he is born as he would have been, if Adam had not sinned. He may have no moral character at the first; but when moral agency commences, and

he begins to have a character, it is as likely to be good as bad. If he is rightly instructed, and a proper example is set before him, it is even more likely to be holy than sinful. And, as this individual advances in life, his character will be a mixed one, in which sin or holiness will be likely to predominate, according as the influences with which he is surrounded are bad or good.

We hardly need stop to refute this theory of infant character, as no evangelical Christian can possibly adopt it. It is inconsistent with all those Scriptures which speak of the entire sinfulness of the natural man. It is inconsistent with the doctrine of regeneration. There can be no regeneration, on this ground. Reformation, improvement, may be desirable, but *regeneration*, in the proper sense of the term, is both unnecessary and impossible. This view of human nature and character is, moreover, inconsistent with the distinction, so constantly made in the Bible, between the righteous and the wicked. On this ground, there *is* no such distinction. There is no room for any. The wicked are of a mixed character, partly holy and partly sinful, and the righteous are no more than this; so that all ground of distinction between the two classes is removed. Finally, this theory of human nature and character is contradicted in the experience of all spiritually enlightened Christians. It is contradicted by universal observation and history. It is inconsistent with any scheme of evangelical religion, and, as we said, can be embraced by no evangelical Christian. We drop it, therefore, without further remark, and pass to another theory of infant character.

There are those who believe that the infant is not a moral agent, and consequently has no sin, who still believe that he has inherited a degree of *depravation* or mental *derangement* from a fallen father. He is not in the state he would have been, if Adam had not sinned. He is in *such* a state, that as soon as moral agency commences, and he begins to do anything of a moral nature, he begins to sin; and from this time forward, all his moral acts are sinful, unless he is renewed by sovereign grace.

It will be seen that, although this theory agrees with the last, in regarding the infant as yet without sin, it differs from it in other important respects, and should not be confounded with it. The former doctrine is un-evangelical; this is not necessarily so. It is held by some excellent ministers and Christians. Still, it is open to very serious objections.

In the first place, this sinless infant, who is not yet a moral agent, is either a human being — a member of the great family of man —

or he is not. If he is not yet a human being, then he is a mere animal; and why not regard and treat him as an animal? Why baptize him, or pray for him, or have a funeral for him in case of death, more than for any other little animal? And why indulge any fond hopes, should he be taken away, in respect to his immortality?

But it will be conceded by those with whom we now reason, that the infant is of the same race with us, is a human being. And if so, then he possesses all that pertains to a human being. He has a human soul, as well as body; a soul in possession of all the human faculties; and these faculties, it should seem, must be in an active state. How can they be otherwise? What are we to think of a healthy, human soul, in possession of all the faculties of a soul, existing for weeks, months and (as some say) years, in a state of inactivity, thinking, feeling, doing nothing, and being (so far as concerns any conscious, active existence) as though it had not been?

Besides; we know that the soul of the infant is *not* inactive. It is in full activity very early, and probably from the first. It begins to receive ideas from the outer world the first moment it enters it; which shows that the *intellect* is not inactive. It has *feeling* too, and commonly expresses it, almost with its first breath; which shows that the *sensibilities* are active. The *will* is also active, moving the different members of the body, from the first.

But it will be said, although there may be action, there is no moral action, and consequently no moral character. But if the actions of the infant are not moral actions, then they are mere animal actions, and we are thrown back upon the absurd hypothesis of a mere animal existence. Besides; if moral agency does not commence at the first, when does it commence? When does the child cease to be a mere animal, and begin to be an intelligent and moral being? Whenever this change takes place, it is obviously a great change, and ought to be a perceptible one. It should seem there could be no difficulty in determining the time. Who, then, ever has determined it? Who can?

But we have not yet done with the difficulties and absurdities of this hypothesis. The infant, it is said, has not yet any moral character, good or evil. Is it, then, an *accountable* being? Is it morally responsible? Responsible for what? If called into judgment (as we are assured that all human beings must be) what has it to account for? It has no moral character, has done nothing either good or evil; and for what shall it give an account?

But further; is this infant, without any character, an *immortal*

being? Most people believe that deceased infants do live hereafter; but on the theory we are considering, *where* do they live? Not in heaven; for they have done nothing good. They are not holy. Not in hell; for they have no sin, and consequently deserve no punishment. In what compartment or region of the future world, then, are they to be placed?

Such are some of the difficulties which beset the theory that the infant, at the first, has no moral character, either sinful or holy. They lie equally against the Pelagian theory, and the more plausible evangelical theory.

There is another objection to both these theories, of more weight than anything which has been advanced. It is a position, in fact, which *contradicts* them both; viz. that infants *have a character*, and a *sinful* character. It need not be inquired here, on what *grounds* infants are to be regarded as sinners. This question will be taken up in its proper place. But the *fact* of their sinfulness we hold to be susceptible of the most ample proof. And every argument in support of it is, of course, an argument against both of the theories which have been considered. That infants are, on some ground, sinners, we urge,

1. From the fact, that they are *the descendants of Adam*, the father of us all. The Scriptures assure us, that all the descendants of Adam, without an exception, are sinners. "Through the offence of one" (Adam) "the many *are dead*," spiritually dead. "By one man's disobedience, the many were made *sinners*." "By the offence of one, judgment came upon *all men* to condemnation." (See Rom. 5: 15—19). There is no evading the force of these passages. They represent the children of Adam, universally, as somehow sinners, dead in sin, and under condemnation, in consequence of his first offence. We have only to ask, then, are infants among the descendants of Adam? Are they his children?

2. We put this argument in a somewhat different shape, and urge the sinful character of infants, from the fact that they are *human beings*, and belong to the *human race*. The sinfulness of the entire human race, without an exception, is taught, in the plainest terms, in the Bible. "*Man's* heart is evil from his youth." Not this man, that, or the other; but *man in the general, every man*. (Gen. 8: 21). Again; "the heart of the *sons of men* is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live." (Ecc. 9: 8). This, too, is spoken of the sons of men generally, universally. Paul says: "We have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are *all under sin*."

As it is written: There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that understandeth; there is none that seeketh after God; they are all gone out of the way; they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." (Rom. 8: 9—12). These passages teach, as plainly as words can teach anything, that *mankind, universally, are sinners*. Not only is no exception made, but all exception is, by the very terms, excluded. "There is none that doeth good, no, not one." We have only to ask, then, as before, are infants included among mankind? Do they belong to the human species? If so, they are, by the testimony of their Creator, sinners.

3. There are many other Scriptures which teach the same doctrine. The following passages may be cited as examples: "That which is born of the flesh, is *flesh*; and that which is born of the Spirit, is *spirit*." (John 8: 6). Parallel passages leave no room for doubt as to the meaning of these remarkable words. Our Saviour here says to Nicodemus, and sets it forth as a ground of the necessity of regeneration, that all "which is born of the flesh, is *flesh*;" i. e. *flashly, carnal, sensual, sinful*; as all "that is born of the Spirit, is *spirit*," or *spiritual*. It is as certain, then, that infant children are *sinful*, as it is that they are born of the flesh.

David says: "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies." (Ps. 58: 3). The last clause of this verse has been thought by some to qualify the preceding part, and to spoil it, as a proof-text, on this subject. But we do not so understand the passage. The question is, Which part of the verse is to be understood to the letter, and which in a somewhat modified sense? Does the Psalmist mean to say, that the wicked are not estranged from God, until they have learned to speak, and begin literally to tell lies? Or is this the sense: "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray as soon as they be born; having from the first an evil, deceitful, lying spirit?" In our own mind, there can be no question here. The latter is clearly the sense of the passage; and thus interpreted, it is decisive to our present purpose. We have a parallel passage in Isaiah. "I knew that thou wouldst deal very treacherously, and wast called a *transgressor from the womb*." (Is. 48: 8).

Paul, speaking of himself and his Christian brethren, says: "And were *by nature* the children of wrath, even as others." (Eph. 2: 3). To be a child of wrath is, unquestionably, to be a sinner; and such Paul represents himself, his Christian brethren, and all others, to have been *by nature*. Whatever else may be the import of this

phrase, *by nature*, it must mean, we think, as much as this, that all men are sinners *e natu*, from their birth; since whatever belongs to us *by nature* must be from birth.

We quote but another passage in proof of the point in question. "We thus judge," says Paul, "that if one died for all, then were *all dead*." (2 Cor. 5: 14). The word *dead* here obviously means *dead in sin*; and in this death the Apostle represents all men as involved, all those for whom Christ died. Did Christ, then, die for infants? Have they any interest at all in his death? If so, then they are sinners, dead in sin.

4. That infants are in some way sinners, is evident from their title to *circumcision and baptism*. No one doubts that infants, under the old dispensation, were required to be circumcised; and no Pedobaptist doubts that they are now to be baptized. But what is the spiritual import of these religious rites? What do they signify? We understand both as signifying much the same; the former, the circumcision of the heart, or regeneration; the latter, the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. But why should religious rites be applied to infants, denoting the cleansing, the purifying of the heart, if the heart is not impure, if it needs no cleansing, in other words, if it is not sinful? This argument was constantly urged by Augustine against the Pelagians: "Why baptize infants, if they have no sin?" And the argument, as it seems to us, is perfectly conclusive.

5. We argue from the *sufferings* of infants, that they are sinners. That infants suffer early, and in some instances severely, there can be no doubt. And there are but three ways in which it is possible to account for their sufferings, in consistency with the goodness or the justice of God. They must either suffer as mere animals, and on the same ground as animals; or they must suffer as our Saviour did, by their own consent; or they must suffer as sinners, and for their sins. The first supposition reduces infants to the condition of mere animals, which few persons will consent to do. The second, no one will claim to support. We are shut up, therefore, to the last. The infant suffers as a *sinner*, and *for his sins*.

Perhaps it will be said, that the infant suffers for the sin of Adam. But those who say this will also say, that he is a *partaker* of the sin of Adam, and *guilty of it*; so that after all, he suffers for his own sin. We know not that any theologian has pretended that infants suffer for the sin of Adam, while they have no sin of their own. And should such a pretence ever be urged, it would conflict with all our ideas of justice.

6. That infants are sinners may be further proved from their *death*. We might infer as much as this from the mere fact of their dying (unless we will consent to regard them as brute animals), even if we had no light from the Scriptures on the subject. But the Scriptures do afford us light. They assure us, in the plainest terms, that, to all the sons and daughters of Adam, *death is a fruit of sin*. "By one man sin entered into the world, and *death by sin*; and so death hath passed upon all men, for that *all have sinned*." (Rom. 5: 12). It is as certain from this and the parallel passages, that infants are sinners, as it is that they are subject to death. For to all the human species, the posterity of Adam, death is a fruit and a proof of sin. We only add,

7. The sinfulness of infants is proved from the fact of their *salvation*. Many persons are unwilling to admit the sinful character of infants, from a fear that it will endanger their salvation. If they are really sinners, they may not be saved. But to this we reply, if infants are not sinners, *they cannot be saved*. Saved from what, if they have no sin? They cannot be saved from the punishment of sin, for they have done nothing to deserve punishment. They cannot be saved from the curse of the law, for they have never broken the law, or fallen under its condemning power. They cannot be saved from sin itself, for they have none. In short, there is nothing, on this ground, for the infant to be saved from, and his salvation, from the nature of the case, is impossible.

We do not say that the infant, without sin, may not possibly go to heaven; but we do say that he can never go there *through the salvation of the Gospel*. He can never go there, through the washing of regeneration, and sprinkling of the blood of Christ; for this mode of getting to heaven necessarily implies *sin*; a sinful heart to be renewed, and sin to be forgiven; neither of which, according to the supposition, can be said of the infant child.

Most Christians hope and believe, that those who die in mere infancy are saved. Such, certainly, is our own belief. But if we did not regard the infant as a sinner, we could not indulge such a belief a moment. For, as we just said, if the infant is not a sinner, he has nothing to be saved from; he needs no salvation; he has nothing of which salvation can be predicated; and salvation, in his case, is impossible.

We have now proved, as we think conclusively, and that, too, from several sources of evidence, that infants are sinners. They have a moral character, and this is sinful. It is now time to press the

inquiry further, and ask: *How* are they sinful? On what grounds? In what way?

On these questions, those who agree as to the fact of infant sinfulness are divided into three classes. 1. Those who hold that we all existed and sinned in a previous life, and brought a sinful character into the world with us. 2. Those who teach that the infant has a *sinful nature*, but no actual sin. 3. Those who hold that it has active moral affections from the first, and that these are selfish and sinful.

Let us examine each of these theories, or suppositions, in their order; and, first, that of an active, moral and sinful existence, in a previous state. This idea has its advocates in Germany, and is held by some in our own country. The supposition is that, at the time of the original revolt in heaven, a vast multitude of angels, of different orders, were drawn into it, and apostatized together. Of these, the great leaders, the more knowing and guilty ones, were driven at once from heaven, and sent down to hell. But towards the multitude, who were less guilty, God was pleased to entertain thoughts of mercy. He kindly stayed the stroke of justice, and reserved them for another probation, a probation of *grace*, in the present world. Being sent one after another into human bodies, these constitute the present race of men, and such is the probation which is enacting here.

My first objection to this theory is, that it is a mere assumption, without one particle of proof. It has no proof, that we can discover, from Scripture. It has none from human consciousness or memory. No one can remember that previous life, or knows anything about it. It helps to remove no theological difficulties, nor is it implied, so far as we can see, in any connected theological truths. In short, it is a mere assumption, without proof, and has no claim to be admitted, even if nothing could be urged against it. But the testimony of Scripture *is* against it.

1. The Scriptures make a wide distinction between fallen angels and men. They belong to different species. They constitute different orders of beings. The angels are represented as much older than ourselves, and as possessing higher intelligence and power. Man was "made a little *lower* than the angels." (Ps. 8: 5.) But the theory under consideration quite confounds this distinction. According to this view, we are all fallen angels. We belong to the same class with them. We apostatized together. Some of our partners in that dire transaction may be more guilty than we, and on that account may be denied a probation in the flesh. Still, they are

the same kind of creature, and belong to the same species as ourselves.

2. The Scriptures teach us that *all* the sinning angels, and not a part of them, were thrust down to hell. "God spared not the angels that sinned," so far as appears, not one of them, "but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment." (2 Pet. 2: 4.) Again, "The angels, which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day." (Jude 6.) Such is the account given us in Scripture of the destiny of the fallen angels. The sentence of the law was at once executed upon them, and they were all sent down to hell. But according to the view we are considering, only a *part* of the sinning angels were thus disposed of. Vast multitudes of them, myriads upon myriads, were not sent to hell at all, but reserved for another probation on the earth.

3. The Scriptures further teach us, that the spirit of man *is created*, when it enters the body, and not that it comes from a preëxistent, sinful state. So it was with the first man. God did not take an old devil, and put it into Adam's new-made body, but "he breathed into him the breath of life, and *he became a living soul*;" or as Paul expresses it, he "*was made a living soul*." (1 Cor. 15: 45.) So it was with the first man; and so it has been, there is reason to believe, with men ever since. Accordingly, God is said by one of the prophets, not only to "stretch forth the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth," but to "*form the spirit of man within him*." (Zech. 12: 1.)

4. The Scriptures clearly teach us, that the primeval state of man on the earth was a *holy state*. "God made man upright." (Ecc. 7: 29.) He made him in his own image and likeness, and blessed the new-made pair; and "God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was *very good*." (Gen. 1: 27—31.) The whole intercourse between God and our first parents previous to their eating the forbidden fruit, and his fearfully altered mode of treating them immediately afterwards, show that this was their first offence, and that up to the time of their committing it they had been holy.

But on the theory we oppose, our first parents were as entirely corrupt before they ate the forbidden fruit, as afterwards. They were old transgressors from another world, who had been put into bodies here, in order that they might have a new probation. How, then, could God bless them, and pronounce them *very good*, and hold such affectionate intercourse with them, up to the time of their first

recorded transgression? Let those who deny the primeval innocence of our first parents answer this question, if they can.

5. The theory we are considering ascribes too much *intelligence* to the new-born infant. The more common view, we think, ascribes too little. But this goes quite to the other extreme; so much so, as not to agree at all with facts. According to this view, the infant is not a new-made soul, just entering into life, just opening its powers to receive impressions, and form a character for itself; but it is an old devil, who has lived, we know not how long, in some previous state, biding its time to enter on a new probation. We insist that such a doctrine agrees not at all with the obvious condition of the infant mind, or with the small degree of intelligence and power with which it commences its career on the earth.

6. But further; the Scriptures expressly connect our state of sin and death with *the fall of Adam*, and not with a previous state of sin in some other world. "In Adam, all die." "By the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation." "By one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners." We have before quoted these and the like passages to prove the sinfulness of all the descendants of Adam. We now quote them to show, that our sinfulness has not come with us from a preëxistent sinful state, but is in some way connected with the first offence of Adam.

7. We add but another objection to the theory before us, which is this: The Scriptures represent us as to be called into judgment only for the deeds *done here in the body*. (2 Cor. 5: 10.) Whereas, on the view we are considering, our deeds in a previous life should all come into judgment. They are forgotten now, but they will be seen and remembered in the final day, and may be expected to constitute a great part, perhaps by far the greater part, of the deeds for which we shall then be called to answer.

With these objections, we dismiss the first theory of infant sinfulness, and proceed to a consideration of the second, viz. that of an inherited *sinful nature*.

And here we are prompted to inquire, first of all, what is intended by a sinful nature. If it means nothing more than *internal sinful affections*, which are *natural* to us, we will not object, except to the terms. But if it means something in the very state and constitution of the soul, something back of, and distinct from, sinful affections, and out of which such affections grow; in this sense of the words in question, we cannot account for the sin of infants, by supposing them to possess a sinful nature. A nature, in this sense, cannot, as it seems

to us, be sinful. It is not a thing of which sin or holiness can be predicated.

This is not the place to go into a prolonged discussion of the vexed question as to the nature of sin. Suffice it to say, that the advocates of a sinful nature, in the sense explained, present us with *two entirely different kinds of sin*; original and actual, the sin of nature and of practice. Whereas the Bible speaks of only one kind of sin. "Sin," says the Apostle John, "is the *transgression of the law.*" And as though this alone were not enough, he adds: "Whosoever *committeth sin, transgresseth also the law.*" (1 John 3: 4.)

Again; the advocates of a sinful nature, in the sense explained, present us with a kind of sin, which can with no propriety be made the subject of *prohibition*. Why prohibit that which belongs to our very nature, and of which we cannot rid ourselves, if we would?

Still again; we have here a kind of sin (if sin it be) of which God alone is the responsible *author*. Who is the author of it, if he is not? Certainly, we have had no concern in originating it, more than in originating any other part of our nature, or our very souls.

Further; we have here a kind of sin (if it be sin) for which we are not to be called to an account in the day of judgment. God will bring every *work* into judgment. Men will be rewarded or punished in the other world, not for their natures, but for their deeds.

In short, this supposed form of sin, which attaches to our natures, and not to our exercises, of which we are not the *actors*, but the *passive subjects*, is properly no sin at all. It is an abuse of the term to call it sin. The Bible presents us with no such form of sin as this.

We reject, then, the second theory as to the sin of infants, and are brought to a consideration of the third, viz. that the infant has active moral affections from the first, and that these are selfish and sinful.

And what objection is there to this supposition? If the infant is a human being, then it has a human soul, an intelligent, immortal soul, a soul possessed of all the faculties requisite to moral agency; and the presumption is, that these faculties are *active*. It is not too much to say, indeed, that we *know* they are active.

According to the most approved metaphysicians, the three great departments of the human mind are the *intellect, sensibilities and will*; and we know that the infant possesses all these, and that they are *active*, from the first. As before remarked, the infant begins to receive ideas from the outer world, the moment it enters it; which shows that the *intellect* is active. These ideas or impressions awaken feeling, which is almost immediately manifested, in one way or another.

This shows that the *sensibilities* are active. Very shortly, too, the muscles, the limbs begin to move, not as, *ante partum*, from the life of the mother, but from the child's own *separate, individual life*; which shows that the *will* is active. Here now is a human soul, having all the faculties, the susceptibilities of a soul, and each of them in an active state. What objection, then, to the supposition, that this soul has internal exercises and affections, and that these may be sinful?

Our belief is, that in the conceptions ordinarily entertained as to the capacities of infant children, we do them great injustice. They have not, indeed, sufficient knowledge to warrant the supposition that they are præexistent spirits from some other world. But their capacities are much more vigorous and active than we are wont to imagine. It cannot be doubted, that the child of ordinary capacity receives more new ideas, during the first year of his life, than in any subsequent year. It becomes familiar with all surrounding objects. It acquires, among a thousand other things, the elements of a language. If it cannot speak (as many can) its mother tongue, it can *understand* it, in all its simpler and more common uses. And yet it has been made a question, whether little children have souls, whether they have any intelligence at all, whether they are capable of knowing anything. We would as soon doubt whether the man who raises such a question, has a soul, as whether the child has of whom he speaks.

But it will be said that sin is the transgression of a known law; and, as the infant has no knowledge of God or his law, therefore, it is incapable of sinning. "Sin," according to the Scriptures, "is the transgression of the law," not of a *known* law; though in a qualified sense, it may be admitted that the latter is true. But how much is meant, when it is said that sin is a transgression of a *known* law? Must the child, before it can sin, be old enough to be instructed as to the existence and government of God, and the claims of his law? Then many adult persons cannot sin. On this ground, the whole class of uneducated deaf-mutes would be incapable of sinning; and the same may be said of a large proportion of the heathen. These have never been instructed as to God or his law, and have no proper conceptions of either. It will not be pretended, therefore, that sin is the transgression of known law, in such a sense as this.

Every human being may be supposed to have, in the language of Paul, "the law of God written on the heart" (Rom. 2: 15). In other words, every human being has the capacity of moral perception, and

has *some degree* of such perception, *some* knowledge of the right, in distinction from the wrong. This the heathen have. This also has the deaf-mute. This the child has very early, and *may have*, for aught we know to the contrary, from the first. Why may it not as easily and as early perceive the difference between right and wrong, as that between different colors, or sounds? Of this law written on the heart of every human being, sin is a transgression; and if infants are human beings, they are capable of it. Yea, more than this, they are *chargeable with it*; for we have before proved that they are sinners.

Selfishness, in a human being, is always sin. This proposition is indubitable. And of this hateful affection, children are as capable in infancy, as they ever are. Indeed, they begin to manifest their selfishness, and various other forms of sin, as soon as they exhibit anything, almost as soon as they are born. How long do children ordinarily live, before they begin to manifest peevishness, fretfulness, impatience, or stubborn will, resistance to parental authority, and other like forms of wickedness?

But we read of some in the Bible, it is said, who "had no knowledge between good and evil." Such persons, surely, could not sin. Moses does indeed say, in a single instance: "Your children which, in that day, had no knowledge between good and evil, they shall inherit the land, and unto them will I give it." (Deut. 1: 39.) But does Moses mean to represent these children as without the faculties of moral agents; without any character, good or bad; as having little more than an animal existence? We do not so understand the passage. Moses here adopts a very common description of little children, whose knowledge is limited, and who have had no positive instruction respecting God or his law. Of such children it may be said, in a qualified sense, that they "have no knowledge between good and evil," comparatively none; while yet they may "have the law written on the heart," and may habitually transgress it. Does any one doubt, that the children, in that congregation which came out of Egypt, were selfish beings; or that selfishness, in a human heart, is always sin?

We have now shown that infant children have a moral and sinful character, and on what grounds they are to be regarded as possessing such a character; not that they come into the world sinners from some preëxistent state; nor that they have a sinful nature, but no actual sin. They are sinners, because they are selfish creatures. They have the germs, the buddings, the beginnings of selfishness from the first; and all selfishness is sin.

And now if any one ask us, how such infants are to be saved, we answer: In much the same manner as adults. The adult has a sinful, selfish heart, which must be changed by the Holy Spirit, if he is ever saved; and so has the infant. The adult must be forgiven through the atonement of Christ; and so must the infant. Both are saved, if saved at all, through the washing of regeneration, and the sprinkling of atoning blood.

Those who regard the infant mind as *disordered* on account of the fall, but not sinful, believe that the Holy Spirit comes into it, and corrects its disorders, and they call this correction regeneration. But it is no regeneration, in the Gospel sense. Regeneration is a change of *heart*, of the *moral affections*, from sin to holiness. But the infant, according to the supposition, has no moral affections to be changed. It has no sinful heart to be renewed. It is as incapable of regeneration, in the proper sense of the term, as a brute. And as to its indebtedness to Christ for the forgiveness of sins, this too is impossible; because it has no sins to be forgiven.

Those who hold to the sin of nature, without actual sin, believe that the blood of atonement is in some way applied for the cleansing of this nature, after which the subject is prepared for heaven. But we see no adaptedness in the atonement to effect such a result, nor is it likely that it was ever effected. What is the atonement? Not the payment of a debt, or the washing away of sin, *volens volens*. The atonement is simply a *foundation*, on which sin, when forsaken, can be forgiven. Of itself, the atonement saves nobody. The blood of atonement washes away no sin, whether original or actual, whether in the adult or the infant, until that sin, through the grace of the Spirit, is repented of and put away.

But it will be asked: If the infant is capable of sinning, is it capable also of repenting of his sins, so that they may be washed away? To this we reply: If the infant has moral affections at all, then these may be changed, from selfishness to benevolence, from sin to holiness; in which case it will have the *element* of repentance, though not, perhaps, the precise form of it. It has that which *will be* repentance, the moment it comes to a sight and sense of its sins. In this respect, the case of the infant resembles that of a pious heathen. We can conceive of a heathen, who may be saved by Christ, though he has never heard of him, and, of course, has never exercised that form of holiness which we call *faith*. But if he is truly pious, he has the *element* of faith, though not the form. He has that which *will be* faith, the moment he comes where his Saviour is. And so of

the renewed infant. Its affections being changed from sin to holiness, he has now the element of *all* holiness. And his holiness will assume the different forms of repentance, faith, submission, love, whenever the appropriate objects of these several graces are presented to its mind.

It is a recommendation of the view here taken as to the character and prospects of infants, that it places them among the human race, and makes the ground of their salvation the same as that of the rest of mankind. If they are saved at all, as we hope and trust they are, they are saved, like other sinners, on the ground of the Gospel. They are renewed, pardoned, adopted into the family of God, and become his children. And when they are taken up to heaven, they will stand there, not on the ground of their own merits, neither as beings whose disorders have been corrected, but who have nought to be forgiven. They will stand up in the midst of the ransomed throng, and unite with them in singing: "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof, for thou wast slain, and hast *redeemed us to God by thy blood*, out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation."

There is yet another advantage of the view we have taken. It removes all embarrassment as to the *time* when infant children begin to act for themselves, and holds out the strongest inducements to parental fidelity. The question is frequently asked: When do children begin to be moral agents, to act for themselves, and to be guilty of actual sin? On the theories we reject, these are impracticable questions. They never have been answered, and never can be. But on the theory we propose, there is no difficulty. The child begins to be a moral agent, to act for himself, and to commit sin, from the first. It receives its soul, as Adam did his, with the first breath of life, and sets up for itself, a moral agent, as soon as it is born. Its capacities are indeed feeble, its exercises feeble, and its sin of small account, compared with what it will be, if persisted in, in future years; still, it is selfishness, it is sin, it is of the same hateful nature as other sin, and, if left unrestrained and unbroken, will soon branch forth into the most frightful forms of wickedness.

And now if it be asked: How long may this little one's salvation be hoped for, *as an infant*, in case it is removed by death, — we answer: its salvation is not to be looked for at all, except as it is renewed by the Holy Spirit, and washed in the atoning blood of Christ. So long as the infant is *incapable* of parental instruction, it may be hoped that the Spirit will do for it, *without* such instruction, what,

later in life, it could only be expected to do with it. And as soon as the period of instruction arrives, and arrive it will very soon, if parents are faithful to the souls of their children, they have abundant reason to hope that, living or dying, God will bless them with his salvation.

Let them, then, commence early, and pursue assiduously, the work which God has given them to do. From the first, their children should be the objects of earnest prayer. From the first, they should be consecrated and devoted to the Lord. And as the infant mind begins to open, to receive impressions from parental lips, let their "doctrine drop as the rain, and distil as the dew; as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass." For although, as we said, so long as the child is incapable of parental instruction, the Spirit may be relied upon to bestow his blessing without it; yet the Holy Spirit will never wink at parental unfaithfulness. He will not tolerate it, or connive at it. He will not make himself, in this way, the minister of sin. Parents who carelessly neglect their duties to their children, and trust to the Spirit for their conversion, will probably be disappointed. It will be no more than justice, if they should be.

It will be seen, then, how closely this subject urges upon all parents to be faithful. Let them do *their* work, and the Spirit will do his. But let them neglect their appropriate work, as parents, and trifle with their obligations, and there is little hope either for their children or themselves.

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## ARTICLE VI.

### THE ALLEGED DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN PAUL AND JAMES.

By E. P. Barrows, Jr., Prof. Sacred Literature in Western Reserve College.

It is not because we believe that the mass of Protestant readers find serious difficulty in reconciling the language of James respecting justification with that of Paul, that we devote an article to the subject of the alleged discrepancies between these two inspired writers.