

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE II.

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM, CONSIDERED IN REFERENCE TO
THE ACT AND THE SUBJECTS.

BY REV. A. K. ARNOLD, PROFESSOR IN MADISON UNIVERSITY, N. Y.

THE body of Christians known as Baptists regard the act of immersion in water as essential to the validity of Christian baptism, and professed believers in Christ, irrespective of their age, as the only proper subjects of this ordinance. These principles, conscientiously held, make it necessary for them to treat as null and void every other act claiming the name of baptism, and every administration of the rite, whether objectionable or not in its form, which is not accompanied by an intelligent profession of faith on the part of the recipient. And as Baptists hold, in common with all other denominations of Christians, that the Lord's supper was instituted only for the baptized, these principles oblige them to restrict their invitation to partake of the communion to those who have in their judgment duly received the previous rite. No sect repudiates more earnestly than they the iteration of baptism; none regret more sincerely than they the necessity for separation from their brethren at the Lord's table; but while their convictions remain as they are, no other course is open to them. The reasons of these convictions they are always ready to declare; and, by the liberal courtesy of the Editors of this theological journal, they are permitted to do so here and now. In presenting the Baptist view of the act and subjects of Christian baptism, both convenience and brevity will be secured by the free use of the first person plural. The present writer has indeed no authority to represent his brethren of the same ecclesiastical fold in this matter; but it is presumed that no liability exists to important misrepresentation, as there is no noteworthy difference of opinion among us in regard to the sub-

jects here to be discussed. We shall speak first of the act of baptism, and then of its subjects.

I. *The Act of Baptism.*

What is the outward act of baptism? The answer to this question must be contained in the *word* which our Lord employed to designate the rite. We maintain that the word which he employed is not obscure, but plain; not vague, but definite; not general, but particular. We hold that, prior to any critical investigation of its meaning, there is the strongest presumption in favor of its denoting a specific and clearly defined act. Our Lord certainly would not purposely envelop in obscurity the rite by which he wished his disciples, in all nations and to the end of the world, to profess their faith in him and unite themselves to his people. He certainly could not be at a loss to find a word which would make plain to them what he required them to do. Whether the language in which he spoke the words of the authoritative commission to baptize was the Aramaic or the Greek, he by his Spirit directed that commission to be recorded and transmitted to all generations in the Greek language—a language surpassed by no other in copiousness, flexibility, and precision. Besides, the very nature of a positive ordinance imperatively demands this definiteness in the language of its institution. In respect to our more general moral duties, a hint may sometimes suffice, because our own consciences and innate sense of propriety may safely be trusted to interpret it aright. But it is not so with positive external rites, which rest on no foundation of natural religion or intrinsic moral fitness, but derive all their authority from the express command of the Lawgiver. We say, therefore, that there is an almost irresistible anterior probability that the edict enjoining the initiatory rite of Christian discipleship would be expressed in very clear and precise terms; that the Lord would not use a word expressing merely the result of some undefined action, like “cleanse,” “purify,” or a word denoting a generic action, as “wash,” “water”; but that he would se-

lect a word designating a specific action, as "dip," "pour," "sprinkle." And we find the clearest evidence that he did select just such a definite, modal word. The Greek verb βαπτίζειν is neither obscure nor ambiguous. The lexicographers have no difficulty with it whatever. They show no sign of hesitation or uncertainty in defining it. With a unanimity that has no exception entitled to notice, they define it as meaning primarily to "plunge, dip, immerse." We need not enter into any controversy as to its secondary, rare, or questionable meanings. For in such a case as this the primary and ordinary meaning of the word is all that can fairly come into the account. Who can believe that our Lord would in such a case have obscured his meaning by using a common word in a rare and exceptional sense? What worthy motive for doing so can possibly be imputed to him? We maintain, therefore, that the terms in which the rite of baptism was instituted by its divine Author determine beyond reasonable controversy the nature of the act, and exclude everything but immersion. The command seems to us just as plain, its meaning just as certain, as if Jesus had uttered the words of the institution in our own familiar tongue, and had said *ipsissimis verbis*: "Go, disciple all nations, immersing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost"; and the reason why it seems so to us is that, by the verdict of all competent and impartial scholars, the Greek words of the original institution are faithfully and exactly represented by the above English words. It can hardly be necessary to occupy these pages with numerous testimonies in proof that this is the ordinary sense of the word, or even with a long list of names of distinguished scholars who have given these testimonies. We will let two or three unimpeachable names represent the whole. Moses Stuart, "nomen clarum et venerabile," says: "It is impossible to doubt that the words βάπτω and βαπτίζω have in the Greek classical writers the sense of *dip, plunge, immerge, sink, etc.*"¹ Meyer, in his

¹ *Bibl. Repos.* Vol. iii. p. 300, Apr. 1833. He adds, "but there are variations

Critical Commentary on the New Testament, says of the expression *ἐὰν μὴ βαπτίσωνται*, in Mark vii. 4, that it "is not to be understood of *washing the hands*, but of *immersion*, which the word in classic Greek and in the New Testament everywhere means, i.e. here, according to the context, *to take a bath*. So also Luke xi. 38." Alexander de Stourdza, himself a Greek and one of the most learned men of the present age, says: "The verb *βαπτίζω* has, in fact, but one sole acceptation. It signifies, literally and always, *to plunge*. Baptism and immersion are therefore identical; and to say 'baptism by aspersion' is as if one should say 'immersion by aspersion,' or any other absurdity of the same nature."¹ Scores of similar testimonies might be cited; but it would be superfluous to cite them. The question is not in dispute among Greek scholars. There is no opposing testimony that is worthy of notice in the presence of such an agreement of the first scholars of all countries and times. The evidence that the word means to immerse is as complete and incontrovertible as is the evidence that the Greek language has any word to express that meaning.

It is not denied that in some instances words used in the New Testament have a somewhat different sense from that which they bear in classic writers. This results necessarily from the new ideas introduced into human thought by a religion revealed directly from heaven. But it is always to be presumed that the common words of the Greek language are used in the New Testament in the same sense as in the classic Greek; and the contrary is to be made out, in particular exceptional cases, by specific and unanswerable proofs. Such new and sacred senses of old and common words are never far removed from their previous ordinary signification. The sacred sense is always but a facile modification of the classical, and never an entirely new and different one. To

from this usual and prevailing signification; i.e. shades of meaning kindred to this (as happens in respect to most words), some literal and some figurative.

¹ Considerations sur les Doctrines et l'Esprit de l'Eglise Orthodoxe (Stuttg. 1816), p. 87.

attribute to a word whose acknowledged classical meaning is "to dip," "to immerse," the sense of "to pour" or "to sprinkle," would be, not to modify its meaning, but to give it a totally different sense. Such a radical change in the use of language would be without example in the New Testament usage, and subversive of all sound and sober biblical interpretation. The proof is abundant that no such change did take place in the verb βαπτίζω when it was transferred from a common to a sacred sense. In fact, without depending at all upon classical usage, we maintain that the New Testament itself furnishes sufficient data for fixing the meaning of the word beyond any reasonable doubt.

The connections in which it is used plainly point to immersion as its proper meaning. John baptized in the river of Jordan (Mark i. 5). When Jesus had been baptized by him in that stream, he straightway came up out of the water (vs. 9, 10). John afterwards chose Aenon as a suitable place to baptize, because there was much water there (John iii. 23). When Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch they went down both into the water; and after the baptism they came up out of the water (Acts viii. 38, 39). It has often been said that there is no necessity for inferring immersion from such expressions as these; that the persons referred to might have gone where there was much water, and even gone down into the water, to pour or to sprinkle, as well as to immerse. We admit that this *might* be; but the aim of the sincere inquirer is not to determine what possibly might be, but to learn what actually was; the object of a sound biblical criticism is, not to show what sense the words of scripture may possibly bear, but to ascertain what they fairly and naturally import and imply. The case is just this: The above language describes what indeed might possibly be done, but without any apparent reason and contrary to all likelihood, if the act of baptism consisted in pouring or sprinkling, but what would naturally, certainly, and necessarily be done if it consisted in immersion. With this simple statement of the case we are willing to leave the decision to the verdict of candor and common sense.

The grammatical construction of the Greek verb βαπτίζω is incompatible with any other sense than immersion. It is never, in the original text of the New Testament, connected with the word denoting the element by any other preposition than ἐν, in, or εἰς into. In a few instances it is followed in our English version by the preposition with; but in these cases the original either has ἐν, in, or else omits the preposition altogether. And where there is no preposition in the Greek, since the idiom of our language requires one, we are plainly bound to supply the in, which the original so often uses, and are not at liberty to substitute for it the with, which the original never employs.¹ The word is never construed in the active voice with the element as its object, nor in the passive voice with the element as its subject; or, to state the same thing more briefly, persons are always said to be baptized, the element never. We never read, "A. baptized water upon B.," but always, "A. baptized B. in water." We never read, "water was baptized upon them," but always "they were baptized in water." Those former expressions might properly be used, and in all probability would at least sometimes be used if βαπτίζω meant to sprinkle; for that word is construed indifferently in both these ways. Those former expressions would certainly be used if βαπτίζω meant to pour, for that word is construed only in this way. We may say without impropriety, "they were sprinkled with (not in) water," or, "water was sprinkled upon them," though the latter is the more exact expression; but we cannot with any propriety say "they were poured with water"; we must always say "water was poured upon them." This uniform

¹ Tyndale was the first to use with, in this connection. Wicklif has always in. The verb is followed by the defining element in fourteen places. In eight of these, the element is water, and the preposition ἐν, in, is inserted in five instances, and omitted in three (or, according to some MSS., inserted in three, and omitted in five). In the six instances in which the Holy Spirit is specified as the element, the preposition is invariably used. (A few MSS. omit it in Mark i. 8.) If, contrary to all New Testament usage, we should suppose an ellipsis of with instead of in, the noun denoting the element would require to be in the genitive, and not in the dative, μετά, not σύν, being understood.

construction of the word witnesses decisively for the meaning to immerse, and against both the meanings to sprinkle and to pour, but most decisively against the latter.

The figurative uses of the words βαπτίζειν and βάπτισμα in the New Testament accord only with the sense of immersion. "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished" (Luke xii. 50). In these words Jesus had undisputed reference to the suffering into which he was to be plunged, the agony with which he was to be overwhelmed. "I have an immersion to undergo," is the translation of Dr. George Campbell. Of like import is the use of the word in the question which our Lord addressed to the ambitious sons of Zebedee: "Are ye able to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" These expressions lose all their affecting solemnity and depth of meaning when the idea of immersion ceases to be connected with the words "baptize" and "baptism." It was no mere sprinkling of a few drops of grief upon his soul, no trickling upon him of a scanty stream of sorrow, to which he was looking forward, but a complete submersion, the flooding of his soul in an overwhelming tide of anguish. Any other signification than immersion as the basis of this metaphorical language belittles the whole expression, robs it of all dignity and suitableness, and reduces it to a feeble and degrading caricature of that fathomless gulf of sorrow into which his soul sank in the garden and on the cross.

The inner and spiritual truth, which baptism expresses by an outward and visible symbol, can be adequately expressed only by immersion. "Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection" (Rom. vi. 3-5). "Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him" (Col. ii. 12). A

scriptural baptism, therefore, resembles and represents the burial and resurrection of Christ, and by virtue of this resemblance becomes an appropriate symbol and expression of the believer's conformity to Christ, in dying to sin and rising again to a new and holy life. It must exhibit such a likeness to a burial and resurrection as will make its symbolical relation to these great facts appropriate and obvious. In the act of immersion into and emersion out of the water, such likeness to a burial and resurrection is manifest. Substitute either sprinkling or pouring for immersion, and all such likeness utterly disappears. We say therefore that the scriptural import of baptism is inseparable from its form, so that just as soon as the form is changed it ceases to express what it was intended by its divine author to express.

Uniting all the foregoing particulars in one view, we say that the true scriptural meaning of the Greek words *βαπτίζειν* and *βάπτισμα* is that which best agrees with all the uses of these words in the New Testament, without any forced interpretation or elaborate explanation. That must be the true sense of these words, which naturally and obviously explains the expressions, "going down into the water," "coming up out of the water," "being baptized in the Jordan," "in water," "in the Holy Spirit," "into Christ," which shows how there being much water in Aenon was the reason why John chose that place for baptizing; which accounts for the fact that persons are always said to be baptized, the element never; which makes it pertinent to call the overwhelming sufferings of Christ a baptism; which exhibits the resemblance between baptism and a burial and resurrection, and so makes the rite an intelligible and appropriate symbol of the cessation of the old life of sin, and the beginning of a new life of righteousness. Neither aspersion nor affusion fulfils these conditions; immersion fulfils them all perfectly, and in so doing demonstrates itself to be the true scriptural sense of the words. This sense of the words makes all scripture on this subject plain; any other sense darkens the meaning of certain pas-

sages. This has been acknowledged by impartial scholars of different denominations.¹

Instead, then, of finding any such clear proof of a peculiar and sacred sense of the words relating to Christian baptism in the New Testament as would be required in order to justify any other than their admitted classical sense, we find, on the contrary, that the classical sense is positively confirmed in a variety of ways by New Testament usage.

In such a position of the argument we hardly feel the necessity of replying to objections derived from the supposed difficulty of immersion in certain cases referred to in the scriptures. Any objection of this sort must be very strong indeed, to entitle it to serious consideration in opposition to such abundant evidence of the meaning of the original words. It will be enough, certainly, to notice briefly the one instance most frequently adduced and most strongly urged, as an objection to the invariable practice of immersion by the apostles. The baptism of the three thousand in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost is thought by many to afford a valid argument against immersion, both on account of the difficulty of finding within the city a sufficient and convenient supply of water, and also on account of the insufficiency of the time for administering the rite to so large a number. But both these difficulties disappear when the matter is carefully examined. As to the first, Dr. Robinson says: "The holy city would appear always to have had a full supply of water for its inhabitants, both in ancient and modern times. In the numerous sieges to which in all ages it has been exposed, we nowhere read of any want of water within the city. During the siege by Titus, when the Jews, pressed by famine, had recourse to the most horrible expedients, and thousands died daily of hunger, there is no hint that thirst was added to their other sufferings. . . . Within the walls of the city are three reservoirs, two of large size, one about two hundred

¹ "It must be a subject of regret, that the general discontinuance of this original form of baptism, has rendered obscure to popular apprehension some very important passages of Scripture." — Conybeare and Howson, *Life and Epistles of Paul*, Vol. i. Chap. xiii. p. 439.

and fifty feet long and one hundred and forty-four broad ; the other about three hundred and sixty feet long, one hundred and thirty feet wide, and seventy-five feet deep. Just outside of the city, and connected with it by an aqueduct, were three reservoirs, each larger than the largest of the two above mentioned."¹ As to the time required to baptize three thousand persons, it is commonly assumed that all this number were baptized on the same day, though the sacred narrative does not expressly affirm this, nor even necessarily imply it. But admitting that they were, and assuming that only the twelve apostles administered the rite, it would not require more than six hours at the longest, to baptize them all. Each would have had to baptize only about forty per hour, which might easily be done, not only without unbecoming haste, but so as to allow considerable intervals for rest. It is not usual for Baptist ministers, when they have large numbers to baptize, to occupy so much time as a minute and a half in reverently immersing each candidate. But there is no reason for assuming that only the apostles administered the rite. We know very well that they did not regard it as one of their peculiar prerogatives to baptize, but often preferred to delegate the service to others, when it would have been perfectly convenient, so far as appears, for them to have performed it themselves.² How unlikely, then, that on such an occasion they should not at least be assisted by the seventy, or by so many of them as might be present ; and, if there were need, by others also of the one hundred and twenty who are mentioned a little before (Acts i. 15). There is no reasonable objection to supposing that there were sixty or even eighty administrators or assistants. And with so large a number of suitable administrators, and such abundant facilities for baptizing within the city, and just without the walls, there is no reason why the whole work of baptizing the three thousand should have occupied more than two hours in the most deliberate way of performing it ; and no

¹ Robinson's Biblical Researches, Vol. i. pp. 405, 406.

² See Acts x. 48 and 1 Cor. i. 14-17.

reason why it might not have been accomplished with all suitable solemnity in half that time, if there had been any cause for hastening the administration. So there was ample time after Peter's sermon was ended, for the preparations and the baptism before the day closed. So little force has this objection to the apostolic practice of immersion.

We rest then in the conclusion, that as in the pagan classic writers, so also in the New Testament, the Greek words βαπτίζειν and βάπτισμα mean distinctly and invariably to immerse and immersion. This conclusion is confirmed by the best and most ancient translations, eastern and western, and by the critical versions of the ablest biblical scholars of modern times. In all these, so far as they undertake to express the meaning of the original words, that meaning is expressed by terms signifying immerse and immersion. Some of them, like our own English version, merely transfer the Greek words.

Our position is still further confirmed by the well-known fact, that for many centuries there was a uniformity of practice in the whole Christian world, corresponding to the universal agreement as to the meaning of the word. Except in the case of those who, being confined by sickness to their beds, received what was called clinic baptism,¹ immersion was the invariable practice, in all parts of the Christian world for nearly thirteen hundred years, and in most countries for a considerably longer period. It cannot be necessary to make numerous citations in proof of what is so well known to all who have given the subject any careful examination. A conclusion in which there is a general agreement

¹ It is noteworthy that Eusebius (or rather, Cornelius, whose account Eusebius quotes), in mentioning the earliest known instance of this kind, that of Novatian, avoids using the word "baptism": "Having fallen into a grievous distemper, and thinking that he would very soon die, having water poured around him on the bed where he was lying, he received —, if it is proper to say that such a one received." The ellipsis is significant. Afterwards, when this same Novatian, having unexpectedly recovered, was a candidate for the office of presbyter, the unsatisfactory character of his baptism was made a ground of objection to his ordination. — Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles.* (Burton's Oxford ed.), Book vi. Chap. 43, Vol. ii. p. 461.

of standard historians, archaeologists, and critical scholars, does not need to be fortified by a long array of specific testimonies. Until it is disputed by persons as competent to judge in the case as those who affirm it, — by men who can claim to be the peers in ecclesiastical learning of Mosheim and Neander; of Bossuet and Massillon and Brenner; of Von Cöln and Whitby and Wall and Stuart and Coleman and Schaff; we are justified in regarding it as proved without further argument. So it is regarded and treated by those whose office it is to state for the popular enlightenment the results of the investigations of the learned. The standard encyclopedias give a positive testimony on this point; they do not intimate that there is any disagreement or doubt among the learned in regard to the universal prevalence of immersion, except in the case of the sick, for more than a thousand years. We cite as a specimen the language of the Edinburgh Encyclopaedia, in the Article on baptism. "In the time of the apostles the form of baptism was very simple. The person to be baptized was dipped in a river or vessel, with the words which Christ had ordered. The immersion of the whole body was omitted only in the case of the sick who could not leave their beds. In this case sprinkling was substituted, which was called clinic baptism. The Greek church, as well as the schismatics in the East, retained the custom of immersing the whole body; but the Western church adopted, in the thirteenth century, the mode of baptism by sprinkling, which has been continued by the Protestants, Baptists only excepted." To the same purport is the testimony of the other encyclopedias, the Americana, Britannica, Metropolitana, Ecclesiastica, and others of less note.

The first departures from the apostolic practice of immersion of which we have any record occurred about the middle of the third century. They were the natural consequences of the belief which had then come to prevail, that baptism was indispensable to salvation. Those who were in immediate danger of death might, it was hoped, be rescued from eternal perdition by a partial washing, an abridged form of the divine

ordinance, as Cyprian called it.¹ The very form of the question which Magnus submitted to the judgment of Cyprian shows plainly that this clinic baptism was regarded as exceptional and imperfect. It was this: "Whether those are to be accounted lawful Christians, who are not washed all over with the water of salvation, but have only some of it poured on them?" About five hundred years later, in 751, Pope Stephen II., on a similar application from the French clergy, decided, as Cyprian had done, that this partial baptism might be accounted valid in cases of necessity; and so gave a higher and wider sanction to the exceptional practice. But it was almost six centuries more before the Council of Ravenna, A.D. 1311, first placed affusion on a full equality with immersion. And it is not much more than three hundred years, since the first known ordinal of baptism, that published by Calvin at Geneva, about the year 1555, prescribed affusion as the regular mode of administering the rite in ordinary cases. And even after this time, immersion continued to be the ordinary mode in England and Germany. So slowly, notwithstanding the argument from convenience, did affusion and aspersion displace the ancient practice of immersion. Every reader of the writings of the Christian Fathers knows how often and how explicitly they testify to the continuance of the primitive practice. Cyril, in his Catechetical Lectures, and Chrysostom, in his Homilies, make very numerous, and very distinct references to immersion. In the Greek church, as is well known, no other baptism but immersion has ever been practised. Nor is any other now reckoned as valid, in any case, in those portions of that church which still retain the Greek language. A partial indulgence has been granted by the Russian division of the Oriental church since the middle of the seventeenth century. Converts from churches holding orthodox views of the Trinity may be received into the Russian church without immersion, merely on submitting

¹ "Necessitate cogente, et Deo indulgentiam suam largiente, totam credentibus conferunt divina compendia," is the expression which Cyprian uses in his letter to Magnus.

to the chrism, which holds in the Greek church the place of confirmation in the Western churches. But this concession was not granted without opposition, and has never obtained the approval of the other portions of the Oriental church.¹

From what has been said above, it is made evident that Baptists hold no peculiar or sectarian opinions in regard to the proper meaning of the original words which define the act of baptism, or the historical facts in regard to the primitive and long-continued practice in the church. On these subjects, we simply take the evidence as we find it furnished to our hand by those who differ from us in practice. We only assume that the best scholars of all times and countries are trustworthy witnesses. Our singularity and our separation consist only in this: that we feel bound to carry out in practice, strictly and literally, the admitted sense of the Lord's commandment, to conform, constantly and scrupulously, to ascertained apostolic usage in the matter of baptism. We think that the thing commanded belongs to the essence of the command. Our opponents themselves being judges, the thing commanded, the only thing commanded in baptism, so far as the form of the act is concerned, is immersion; and it seems to us an unavoidable inference that there can be no Christian baptism without immersion. We do not find in the divine charter, from which the rite derives all its sacredness and obligation, any authority or liberty to alter its form, or to give the name to any other act than that which is acknowledged to be expressed by the name itself. Whatever sacredness, obligation, importance, or benefit belongs to the rite of baptism, belongs, so far as we can

¹ No longer ago than October, 1851, the chief Patriarch of the Greek church declared in answer to the petition of the Rev. William Palmer, a learned and influential deacon of the Church of England, and a Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, who wished to be received to the communion of the Greek church without being immersed: "There is only one baptism: if some others allow a different one, we know nothing of it, we do not accept it. Our church knows only one baptism, and this without any subtraction, addition, or alteration whatever." His clergy assembled in synod around him, all signified their assent to his declaration. — *Essays on the Anatolic, or Orthodox Church*. Part ii. p. 55 (Athens. 1854; in *Modern Greek*).

comprehend, to immersion, and to nothing else. The rite of baptism is an external observance; but it is a *commanded* observance; and a command to perform a certain external rite cannot be fulfilled by performing in its place some other and uncommanded ceremony. We have no liberty to follow the dictates of taste or convenience, to modify the rite to suit the demands of a more refined civilization; for the command of our divine Master is definite and imperative; and its unmodified obligation is expressly extended, in the language of its institution, to all countries and to all times: "Go, disciple all nations, immersing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." This language precludes for us all consideration of times and seasons, climates and customs, taste and convenience. This is our answer to those who blame us for an unnecessary and unreasonable strictness and subserviency to the letter in this matter. God chooses his own symbols, as well as his own words, by which to express his thoughts. To change the symbol, and still hope to retain and express the divine idea is in our view, just as unwarrantable, just as presumptuous, just as perilous, as it would be to change the words which God has chosen, and still hope to retain and express unimpaired the divine idea which they were intended to convey. Baptism is a symbolical embodiment and expression of divine truth, just as really as any text of Scripture is a verbal embodiment and expression of divine truth. One is just as sacred as the other. There is just as great a risk, just as sure a certainty, let us rather say, in the former case as in the latter, that any change in the expression will involve a change in that which is expressed, — the substitution, in fact, of a human idea in place of the divine. We remember the admonition of Agur: "Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar," We remember the still more solemn admonition with which the Lord himself, in closing the volume of his revealed will, warns us against adding anything to his inspired words, or taking anything from them.

And, remembering these impressive warnings, we feel that we must not allow ourselves to be driven by any dread of reproach, or allured by any desire of union, to swerve from the straight, plain path of exact obedience.

II. *The Subjects of Baptism.*

Viewed with reference to practical results, the question of the proper subjects of baptism far transcends in importance that of the proper act. For, this second question is vitally related to the constitution of the church as a spiritual society. The question at issue here is, whether membership in the church of Christ, including participation in its most sacred privileges, is a matter of hereditary right, or of individual, intelligent choice. At the same time, we freely admit that this last inquiry is more difficult than the former. Neither the teachings of scripture, nor the testimonies of history, are so plain as in the other case. To our minds, these teachings and testimonies are sufficient and decisive; but we can discriminate between different degrees of evidence in support of propositions which we regard as alike adequately proved.

A few preliminary words in regard to the burden of proof may not be out of place. The advocates of infant baptism claim that this burden rests on the opposers of the practice. Under the Jewish dispensation, infants were included in the covenant, and partakers of its sign and seal — the rite of circumcision. There is a valid presumption, therefore, that children would not be excluded under the more liberal and comprehensive new covenant. It is obvious, that the view taken of this subject will have a practical bearing upon the argument. Less positive evidence is required on that side which has already a fair presumption in its favor. The mind is predisposed to admit more readily arguments on that side, and to ascribe to them greater weight. But we do not concede this claim of the advocates of pedobaptism. Whatever presumption might be derived from the analogy of circumcision under the former covenant is, in our view, more than counterbalanced by the express testimony of scripture in

regard to the spiritual and personal nature of the new dispensation, in contrast with the old. This radical difference between the Mosaic and the Christian dispensations pervades alike the prophecies of the Old Testament, and the teachings of Christ and his apostles. Take, as an illustration, the following passage from the prophecies of Jeremiah: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt, which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband unto them, saith the Lord: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people: And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'know the Lord'; for all shall know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer xxxi. 31-34)

This passage is twice quoted in the Epistle to the Hebrews, in a way that enforces our argument (chap. viii. 6-13; 16, 17). It is true that the Christian covenant is expressly contrasted here, not with the covenant with Abraham, to which the rite of circumcision pertained, but with the Mosaic covenant. Nevertheless, our argument holds good; because the features of the new covenant here contrasted with the Mosaic set it also in contrast with the Abrahamic. It is distinctly an individual and personal covenant, founded upon individual character, and securing individual obedience, pardon, and salvation. It is a covenant to which only those are admitted, and in the blessings of which only those have part, who have God's law written in their hearts, who know the Lord, whose sins are forgiven. This description applies even to "the least of them." Those, therefore, who are not yet capable of knowing the Lord, and having his law written

in their hearts, are, by this very fact, incapacitated for membership in this new commonwealth, and unqualified to receive the sign and seal of its blessings. It is a *new* covenant, not only in distinction from the Mosaic, but also in distinction from a mere renewal of the Abrahamic. Such representations of the new covenant as these,—and this passage is but one of the most explicit among many of similar tenor,—seem to us decisively to reverse the presumption founded on the analogy of infant circumcision, and to limit the right of membership in the visible kingdom of heaven to such as give evidence of having been taught to know the Lord, of having received his truth into their hearts, and of having had their sins actually forgiven. These representations are, therefore, opposed to all comprehension or recognition of the nation, the state, or the family, as such. Besides, the argument from John's baptism is much more pertinent than the argument from circumcision. It is generally admitted—universally, indeed, as far as we know—by the defenders of infant baptism, that John's baptism was limited to persons capable of making a personal profession of repentance. If any thought of inferring the propriety of infant baptism from the analogy of circumcision might otherwise have entered the minds of the apostles, it would be effectually precluded by John's baptism. This had made them familiar with the initiatory rite of the Christian dispensation as applicable only to adults, or rather only to those professing penitence, whatever their age might be. These considerations seem to us decisive against the claim of infant baptism to have the advantage of *a priori* probability in its favor. But we proceed to arguments of a more direct nature.

It is not claimed by the advocates of infant baptism that there is any express precept enjoining it, or any plain example of its practice in the New Testament. But they deduce an argument in favor of the practice from the baptism of whole households. It is more probable, they allege, that there were infant children in some of these households at least, than that there were no infant children in any of them. What are

the facts? There are but three cases of the baptism of households recorded in the New Testament — those of Lydia, the Philippian jailer, and Stephanas (Acts xvi. 15-33; 1 Cor. i. 16). It would not be very surprising if in three families, taken at random from any community, there should be no infant children. The writer's family is one of five, occupying contiguous houses in the same village street, in no one of which is there a child under ten years of age; and probably no one ever thought of this as anything remarkable. But granting that the balance of probability would lie on the other side prior to any examination of the particular cases referred to, we maintain that such an examination considerably reduces, if it does not altogether neutralize, or even reverse, that slight balance of anterior probability. In the case of Lydia, a merchant-woman, several hundred miles from her home in Thyatira, the supposition that she was the mother of young children is certainly improbable. There is no evidence, in the narrative, that she was a mother, or even a wife. No reference is made to her husband; no intimation is given that she had one. It seems most likely that she was a widow of at least middle age; since neither an unmarried nor a young woman would be likely to be travelling far from her home in such an occupation. Her household probably consisted of her associates or assistants in the business in which she was engaged. These were the "brethren" whom Paul and Silas met in her house, and "comforted," after they were released from the prison (v. 40). At least, we have no knowledge of any other brethren in Philippi at that time, excepting the jailer's household, from whom they had just come. In this second case, the baptism of all is more expressly affirmed than in the case of Lydia's household: "he and *all* his" (v. 33). But this includes no more, certainly, than "all that were in his house," of v. 32, to whom Paul and Silas "spoke the word of the Lord," or, "all his house," of v. 34, who "rejoiced, believing in God," with the master of the family. No more are said to have been baptized, than are said to have heard the preaching of the

gospel, and believed and rejoiced in God. If there were infant children, incapable of these last acts, they are left out of view in v. 33, as in vs. 32 and 34. The sacred historian did not think it necessary to exclude them in express terms when he spoke of all as being baptized, any more than when he spoke of all as being addressed in preaching, as believing and rejoicing in God. But if, on the other hand, absolutely every member of his family was included in what is said in v. 33, then every member of his family was equally included in the equivalent expressions in vs. 32 and 34. Of the household of Stephanas we know nothing more than what is said in 1 Cor. xvi. 15. There we learn that "they addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints." It is certain, then, that there were adult persons in his household. It is not expressly affirmed that all his household were baptized, nor that all addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints; but whatever comprehension we give to the expression in the former case, we are bound to give the same comprehension to the same expression in the latter. It matters not, therefore, so far as the present argument is concerned, whether we suppose there were infant children in his family, or the contrary. These are the only cases of household baptism mentioned in the New Testament. In only one of these is it expressly said that *all* the family were baptized; and in that one it is said just as expressly that all the family believed and rejoiced in God. It is often falsely assumed in this argument that the New Testament speaks of *household baptism*, as such. The mention of three several cases in which it is said that a single household was baptized is far from justifying such an assumption. There are two other cases in which it is said that a whole household believed (John iv. 53; Acts xviii. 8), and a third, in which it is said that a whole household feared God (Acts x. 2); we might, therefore, as properly speak of household faith as of household baptism. The latter is no more recognized in the New Testament as a definite institution than the former. When

the baptism of large numbers is recorded, as on the day of Pentecost, nothing is said about their households.

The presumption against infant baptism from the character of the gospel dispensation has already been alluded to. The religion of the gospel addresses itself to individuals, intelligent and responsible. It requires intelligent assent. It demands personal submission. All must be voluntary. It rebukes all dependence upon a pious ancestry (Matt. iii. 9). It insists on an individual experience of the new birth (John iii. 3-5). It recognizes as subjects of the King of Zion, and citizens of the kingdom of heaven, only those who know, love, and obey the truth (John xviii. 36, 37). All the passages here referred to seem to us so many arguments against infant baptism, because they all seem to exclude from the earthly organization of the disciples of Christ those whom infant baptism includes in that organization. We know that the primitive Christian societies were not absolutely free from unworthy, and even hypocritical members; but all such are spoken of as "false brethren, unawares brought in" (Gal. ii. 4); which implies that the theory and rule of the Christian society was, to admit only those who were believed to be true brethren, heirs of salvation. This is implied, too, in the introductory addresses of the apostolical epistles. They are directed to saints, chosen and beloved of God. But infant baptism is incompatible with such a theory and rule; it introduces into the church, not unawares, but knowingly, purposely, systematically, and by wholesale, those who give no indication of possessing any of the qualifications everywhere required as essential to discipleship.

Besides this presumption against infant baptism from the very constitution of the Christian church, as represented in the scriptures, the nature of the initiatory rite itself seems to us to forbid its application to those who are incapable of giving evidence of repentance for sin and faith in Christ. Baptism is, in its nature, an explicit and solemn profession of Christian discipleship: "Go, disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and

of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. xxviii. 19). Baptizing whom? The pronoun "them" cannot refer to nations. Common sense forbids it; for baptism is not administered to nations, but to individuals. Grammar forbids it; for the two words do not agree in gender. The pronoun obviously refers to the antecedent "disciples," implied in the preceding verb, "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them." But a disciple is a learner. To make disciples implies the imparting of instruction. Both the verb and the noun always include the ideas of teaching and learning. The same is equally manifest in the parallel passage of Mark's Gospel: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved" (chap. xvi. 15, 16). Indeed, this passage is a plain and emphatic commentary upon the one in Matthew. It tells us how disciples are made, and who are to be baptized. It shows that baptism is for believing disciples only, and that it is a declaration of their faith and discipleship. Equally explicit is the language of Paul, in his Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians: "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore, we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For, if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection" (Rom. vi. 3-5). Baptism is here represented as setting forth, in symbol, the termination of the old life and the beginning of the new. And this is represented, not as its *exceptional* significance, but as its common and invariable import: "so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ," that is, "all we who were baptized into Jesus Christ." Wherever infant baptism is practised, this declaration of the Apostle soon ceases to be true, except in the case of the small minority who are baptized in adult years, on profession of their faith. Again, he says to the Galatians, "ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of

you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ" (chap. iii. 26, 27). Plainly, he here means to say that baptism is in its very nature a profession of faith, of vital and saving union with Christ; that all the baptized had professed to be Christians, in the full sense of the word. Could there be a stronger expression for professing the Christian religion than this of "putting on Christ"? Yet this is what was done in baptism by as many as were baptized. Certainly, in the view of Paul, and of the churches at Rome and in Galatia, all the baptized had distinctly and solemnly professed themselves to be believing disciples, new creatures in Christ Jesus.

There is an important class of passages, two of which have already been referred to, which connect baptism very intimately with regeneration, forgiveness, sanctification, and salvation: "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved" (Mark xvi. 16). "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John iii. 5). "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling upon the name of the Lord" (Acts xxii. 16). "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water, by the word" (Eph. v. 25, 26). "According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Tit. iii. 5). "Baptism doth also now save us (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" (1 Pet. iii. 21). These passages seem to us to constitute a class, and to require to be explained by some common principle. There are two ways of explaining them. One is that churchly, sacramentarian way, which attributes to baptism, as an *opus operatum*, a regenerating efficacy. The other is, to regard baptism as the sign and symbol of an accomplished regeneration, following closely, according to primitive usage, upon the reality which it signifies and symbolizes. The former explanation, in common with all evangelical Christians, we utterly reject. The latter, we accept. And there seems to us to be no room for any third

interpretation. The connection between baptism and the things that accompany salvation is expressed so positively and emphatically, that we must either regard the rite as the appointed and immediate antecedent, or as the appointed and immediate consequent, of the inward spiritual change on which the salvation of the soul depends.

There are other passages of scripture which seem to us to be incompatible with the supposition that infant baptism was a feature of primitive Christianity. In 1 Cor. iii. 10-17, the Apostle Paul admonishes his fellow laborers in the ministry to beware with what materials they build up the churches of Christ. As a building, in order to be fire-proof, must be constructed, not of such combustible materials as wood, hay, and stubble, but of metal or of stone, so the materials incorporated into the church must be such as will abide the fire of God's judgment. This passage is often applied to the minister's doctrine, as if the wood, hay, and stubble referred to errors and heresies, and the gold, silver, and precious stones to the cardinal truths of religion. But such an interpretation is opposed to the constant usage of scripture. The common expressions, "building of God," "house of God," "habitation of God," "temple of God," are never used to represent an abstract system of doctrine, but always to represent persons, either the individual believer, or the church as the collection and community of believers. In vindication of this interpretation, in opposition to the more common one, we need only ask that scripture be compared with scripture, and allowed to explain itself. In this particular case, however, our interpretation is confirmed by the emphatic and reiterated testimony of the immediate context: "Ye are God's building: ye are the temple of God" (vs. 9, 16, 17). The plain inference is, that ministers ought to be careful not to baptize any but those who give evidence of being such as will abide the fiery ordeal of the last day. For it is by administering the rite of baptism that they do their part in incorporating materials into the building of God. The admonition is a solemn one; it will, ere long, be more generally understood and obeyed.

The affecting episode in our Lord's history, recorded in Matt. xix. 13-15; Mark x. 13-16; Luke xviii. 15-17, contains, in our view, decisive proof that infant baptism was at that time not thought of. It is evident, from the mistake which the disciples made in rebuking those who brought the little children to Christ, that the case was a new one in their experience. Had it been common to bring little children to Christ, they certainly could not have thought that the act of these parents would be an annoyance to their Lord. The whole narrative can be reasonably explained only on the admission that such an incident had not occurred before. But this occurred just before the close of our Lord's ministry and life, when he was on his last journey to Jerusalem. Plainly, then, the apostles, who had been accustomed to administer baptism several years before this occurrence, knew nothing of administering it to little children. They were familiar with a baptism which was confined to adults; and, of course, they would, when acting under the commission which they received soon after from their risen Lord, continue to administer the rite to adults only, unless they received specific instruction to the contrary. No trace of such instruction is anywhere found. Had our Lord wished to sanction the baptism of infant children, he could not have desired a more inviting occasion to do so than this incident afforded. But, instead of making any such use of the opportunity, he dismissed these children unbaptized, but not unblest. As to the words which he uttered on this occasion, "of such is the kingdom of heaven," if these words contained no warrant for baptizing these children then, they certainly contained none for baptizing other children afterwards. The true meaning of them is explained by our Lord himself, in immediate connection with their utterance: "Verily I say unto you, whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein" (Mark x. 15; Luke xviii. 17. Compare also Matt. xviii. 3). The kingdom of God belongs to those who have a childlike guilelessness, docility, and trustfulness.

The position in which the Apostle Paul places children in 1 Cor. vii. 14 is also incompatible with their admission to baptism. Speaking of families in which one of the parents is a Christian and the other is not, he distinctly classes the children with the unbelieving parent. The purport of his argument against the separation of husband and wife in such a case is this: "if the Christian cannot, as some of you argue, live with the unbelieving partner without contracting defilement from the association, then it would be necessary to separate from your own children." The same rule that declares the unbelieving parent unclean applies equally to the children. In opposition to this false sentiment, he teaches that the unbelieving husband has been sanctified in the wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified in the husband. If it were not so, the children would be unclean; but now they are holy. They are holy, because the unbelieving parent has been sanctified, or made holy. They belong to the same category with the unbelieving parent; they are holy in the same sense in which the unbelieving parent is made holy, and in no other. The argument is partly obscured in our version by the change of terms; but to be sanctified, is to be made holy; and in the same limited and relative sense in which holiness is predicated of the unbelieving parent it is predicated of the children. If it were legitimate to argue from this passage, that the children of such parents ought to be baptized, it would be a necessary result of the same argument, that every man or woman who has a believing wife or husband ought also to be baptized.

Had infant baptism been introduced by the apostles, the baptism of adults would early have become only exceptional, and "visible saints," to use the expression of President Edwards, would very soon have constituted no more than a minority of the baptized. The statistics of modern Pedobaptist missions show how rapidly this change would take place. In the Ahmednuggur Mission of the American Board of Commissions for Foreign Missions, twenty-three years after its establishment, there were one hundred and ninety-eight

communicants, of which number eighteen were baptized in infancy, while during the same period two hundred and forty-eight children had been baptized. The number of infants baptized was to the number of adults, therefore, as two hundred and forty-eight to one hundred and eighty, or more than four to three. The South African Mission of the Rhenish Missionary Society, about twenty years after its establishment, reported at one station seven hundred communicants to two thousand three hundred and forty baptisms; at another station, five hundred communicants to one thousand baptisms; at a third, one hundred communicants to four hundred baptisms. The Tinnevely Mission of the Church Missionary Society, thirty-two years after its establishment, reported two thousand nine hundred and ninety communicants to fourteen thousand eight hundred and thirty-two "baptismal converts." In the New Zealand Mission of the same Society, after about forty years of its history, the statistics stood, "forty-five thousand native converts, of whom between five thousand and six thousand are communicants." So rapidly does infant baptism, where it is generally practised, displace the baptism of adults. So soon do the unconverted baptized far out-number the "visible saints." Now, if we suppose that infant baptism was practised in the apostolic churches, we must believe that all the teachings of scripture in regard to the nature and import of baptism are applicable only to an exceptional use of the rite, which was rapidly growing more and more rare, and which, in the course of half-a-century after Christianity was planted in any community, would almost entirely disappear. We are fairly bound, moreover, on this supposition, to account for the silence of the New Testament in regard to a class of persons who must have constituted the majority in some Christian communities before the canon of scripture was closed,—persons who, having been baptized in infancy, had grown up without giving any evidence of saving faith. For we have no warrant for supposing that the proportion of such persons would be materially different from what it is at the

present day in missions founded and conducted by the most evangelical Pedobaptist denominations.

We have thus far briefly exhibited the principal scriptural grounds for our rejection of infant baptism. Although Baptists stand alone in their *practical* rejection of it, they are sustained by the judgment of the ablest biblical scholars as to the lack of scriptural evidence for the practice. Dr. Hackett has said: "The opinion that infant baptism has any legitimate sanction from any passage in the New Testament is no longer tenable at the bar of biblical criticism."¹ In his Commentary on Acts xvi. 15, he cites the testimony of DeWette, Meyer, Olshausen, and Neander, who all agree in abandoning the attempt to establish the practice on scriptural proofs. Dr. Sears, in his review of "Burgess on Baptism," in the *Christian Review* for June 1838, cites similar testimonies from more than a score of the leading biblical scholars of Germany. We extract only a few. Olshausen says of the practice, that "it certainly was not apostolical." Starck says: "the New Testament presents just as good grounds for infant communion as for infant baptism." Hahn says: "we must concede that the opposers of it cannot be contradicted on gospel ground." Winer says: "originally only adults were baptized." Lange says: "all attempts to make out infant baptism from the New Testament fail. It is utterly opposed to the spirit of the apostolic age and to the fundamental principles of the New Testament." Schliermacher says: "all traces of infant baptism which are found in the New Testament must first be put into it." These declarations of the most eminent Pedobaptist scholars are sufficient to show that we have not put any forced, sectarian construction upon the scriptures bearing on this subject.

As genuine Protestants, we hold that it is not necessary to go beyond the New Testament in this investigation. If infant baptism cannot be proved from scripture, it cannot be binding on the Christian conscience. If it can be proved to be

¹ Quoted by Rev. H. E. Robins, in his *Discourse on Qualifications for Baptism*, in "Madison Avenue Lectures," p. 153.

contrary to scripture, it ought to be laid aside. No testimony of uninspired writers, no tradition or practice of the church, however early or however general, can have any authority. Nevertheless, we are perfectly willing, under this distinct protest, to hear the testimony of the Christian Fathers, and to examine the question in the light of church history. The more thoroughly the early Christian writings are studied the clearer will be the proof, we are persuaded, that the practice of baptizing infants grew up gradually, as a consequence of the corruption of apostolic doctrine.

The collection of writings attributed to the apostolical Fathers contains, without doubt, some of the earliest uninspired Christian literature. We have no need, in this connection, to raise any question as to their genuineness, or the precise date of their composition; for in none of them do we find any mention of the baptism of infant children, or any reference to such a practice. Some have, indeed, attempted to prove the existence of the practice from certain expressions of Clement of Rome and Hermas, showing that they regarded baptism as essential to salvation. They infer that, where that belief was held infants would of course be baptized. But with thorough-going Protestants such an inferential argument injures, rather than helps, the cause of infant baptism; for it admits, what, indeed, is susceptible of clear proof, that the dogma of baptismal regeneration can bring plainer and earlier evidence of its existence than the practice of baptizing infants can. So this unlucky argument helps us to account for the subsequent introduction and growth of the practice. The argument is of no value to prove that the practice already existed; but the truth which it contains is of much value in explaining how the practice soon came into existence.¹

Justin Martyr comes next in order of time. He wrote about the middle of the second century. When the extent

¹ See this connection between the dogma in the question and the rise and growth of infant baptism more fully developed in "The Christian Review" for January, 1861.

of his works is considered, and especially the particularity with which he describes, in his two Apologies, the rites of baptism and the Lord's supper, the fact that he never makes any mention of the baptism of infants is very strong evidence against its existence in his day. But his testimony against it is not merely the negative testimony of silence. In the sixty-first chapter of his First Apology he characterizes baptism as the voluntary act of those who have been previously instructed, who have become persuaded, repentant, and converted. He does not leave us at liberty to suppose that he uses this language, applicable only to the baptism of believers, merely because he had no occasion to speak of the baptism of infants, though it was common in his time; for he professes to give an exact account, and to suppress nothing; he professes to describe *Christian baptism*, and not *one class* of baptisms merely, and that the *least numerous* class, as it must have been in his day if infant baptism had been practised from the time of the apostles; he makes a distinct allusion to infancy, and contrasts the ignorance and necessity which characterizes our natural generation with the knowledge and choice which accompany our spiritual regeneration — a contrast which he could hardly make without thinking of infant baptism, if it existed; and which, he would hardly venture to make, if he did think of it as existing; and, finally, he says expressly, that those regenerated in the manner above described, i. e. after instruction, repentance, faith, and expressed desire for baptism, are regenerated in the *same manner* as the rest of the Christian community, thus excluding the supposition that a large part, if not the largest part, of the Christians of his day had been baptized under circumstances entirely different, without instruction, repentance, faith, choice, or knowledge.¹ Christian baptism, according to Justin, is the

¹ Justin gives to baptism the name *regeneration*; but it is the regeneration of those already instructed, convinced, and penitent, renewed in heart and reformed in life. In one place, in his Dialogue with Trypho, he speaks of baptism as "able to cleanse those who have repented," — τὸ βάπτισμα, τὸ μόνον καθαρῶσαι τοὺς μετανοήσαντας θυμένον.

dedication of *ourselves* to God, not the being dedicated by our parents or sponsors. One single passage, in the fifteenth chapter of his First Apology, has been used by some as an argument in favor of the existence of infant baptism in his day: "There are," he says, "many men and women among us now sixty or seventy years of age, who were *discipled to Christ* when they were *children*." But the expression "discipled to Christ," implies, by the intrinsic force of the word, and by New Testament usage (Matt. xiii. 52; xxvii. 57; xxviii. 19; Acts xiv. 21) previous instruction; and the word translated children, *παιδων*, is not commonly applied to infants. It is the word applied, in Matt. xxi. 15, to the children who greeted Christ in the temple with shouts of Hosanna; in Luke ii. 43, to our Lord himself, when he was twelve years old; in Luke viii. 51-54, to the daughter of Jairus, who was of just the same age; and, in Acts xx. 12, to Eutychus, the young man (called *νεανίας* in v. 9), who fell from the upper window while Paul was preaching at Troas. In only one instance in the New Testament is this word used of those who were strictly infants, namely, in the account of the slaughter of the children at Bethlehem by Herod (Matt. ii. 16); and in this case the reason for using it probably was, to show that the cruel decree included the male children only, which would not have been shown if the evangelist had used the neuter diminutive, *παιδια*, which might, in other respects, have seemed the more proper word.

Irenaeus wrote at the close of the second century. A single passage in the second book of his work on the Heresies is claimed by some defenders of infant baptism as a testimony to the existence of that practice. He there says: "Christ came to save all by himself,—all who by him are regenerated unto God,—infants, and little ones, and children," etc. The sense of this disputed passage, so far as our present subject is concerned, turns upon the meaning of the expression, "regenerated unto God." It is admitted that Irenaeus sometimes uses the word "regeneration" as synonymous with baptism; but, in these cases, he is accus-

tomed to make the reference plain by some such definite addition as, "the bath of regeneration." No instance has been produced in which he uses the undefined expression, "regenerated unto God," as plainly equivalent to, or implying baptism. It is quite in accordance with his known views to understand him in this passage as affirming that Christ, by the very act of taking upon himself our nature, summed up in himself our entire humanity, and regenerated it in the mass, placing all mankind in a new relation to God.¹ This is the view of his meaning to which modern critical scholarship decidedly leans. Winer, Hagenbach, Starck, Bunsen, and many other eminent German scholars, deny that there is any reference at all in this passage to infant baptism.

Tertullian, who wrote about the same time with Irenaeus, was for a long time regarded as the first Christian writer who makes explicit mention of the baptism of infant children. In the eighteenth chapter of his work on Baptism, he argues against the too hasty administration of the rite, "especially in the case of little ones." Neander regards this chapter of Tertullian's work as proving that infant baptism "had not yet come to be regarded as an apostolic institution."² It is certain that if Tertullian speaks of infant baptism, he speaks of it with disapprobation. But a more accurate knowledge of the usages of the ancient church, derived from documents discovered in our own day, makes it appear more probable that the practice which Tertullian censured was not the baptism of infants incapable of making any profession of Christianity, but of boys and girls from six to ten years of age. This is the view of his meaning which Bunsen regarded as established by the testimony of the Alexandrian Church-Book. The expressions and arguments which Tertullian uses certainly agree better with this hypothesis than with the view that he had reference to those properly denominated infants. He uses the term "parvuli," and says that we show more

¹ See the proof of this interpretation fully presented in an Article in the *Bibliotheca Sacra* for November, 1849.

² Church History (Torrey's translation), Vol. i. p. 312.

wisdom in worldly matters, than to entrust precious treasures to minors.

Clement of Alexandria was contemporary with Tertullian. He speaks repeatedly, both in his "Pedagogue" and in his "Stromata," of the necessity and efficacy of baptism; but he has not a word to say of the baptism of infants.¹

Origen wrote most of his works during the second quarter of the third century. There are three passages in his Commentaries (on Lev. xii. 1-8; 14th Homily on Luke, ii. 21-24; on Rom. v. 9) in which he speaks of infant baptism as a subject about which there was much inquiry among the brethren, as an apostolical tradition, and as necessary to remove the pollution of original sin. In all these three passages the original text is lost, and we have only the Latin translation. That neither Jerome nor Ruffinus, his Latin translators, were scrupulously faithful we know, from their avowed principles, from their mutual recriminations, from their express confessions, and from the comparison of their versions with the original where it is still extant. Not a single passage favoring infant baptism has been found in the Greek text of his writings. On the contrary, there are two passages, at least, which are adverse to the supposition that it then existed. In his third Book against Celsus, chap. 59, he speaks of exhorting sinners to come to the true instruction, and little children to rise in elevation of thought to manhood; and then adds, "when those thus exhorted show that they have been cleansed by the word, then we invite them to be initiated among us." In the twelfth Homily on Numbers (§ 4) he represents each one of the believers as remembering the solemn scene of his baptism. In fine, a double doubt rests upon the alleged testimony of Origen in favor of infant baptism. There is much reason to suspect

¹ The expression, "children who were extracted from the water," — τῶν ἐξ ὕδατος ἀνασπασμένων παιδίων, — was formerly claimed by some as referring to infants; but the best recent scholars recognize no such reference. It occurs in the "Pedagogue," 3, 11, a work in which Christians are spoken of throughout as children.

interpolation on the part of the translators, in the only passages which seem plainly favorable to the practice; and, if these passages are genuine, they may well be understood, like that in Tertullian, of children from six or eight to ten or twelve years of age. The former hypothesis is maintained by Dr. Chase (see *Christian Review* for April, 1854); the latter by Bunsen.

We come next to Cyprian, in the middle of the third century. And here all doubt ceases as to the actual existence of infant baptism in the African church in his time. In the year 252, Fidus, an African bishop, having doubts about the lawfulness of baptizing infants before they were eight days old, wrote to ask Cyprian's opinion. Cyprian called a synod of sixty-six bishops; and their decision was, that such early baptism was lawful. It is somewhat remarkable that this first clear proof of infant baptism should be found in the same district, and at the same time, with the first decision in favor of a more convenient substitute for immersion.¹ It is important to notice the limitations of this first clear evidence of the existence of infant baptism. There is no proof, as yet, of its existence in any other part of the world than in North Africa, a region notorious for early and manifold departures from primitive doctrine and practice; and there is no proof that it was practised there, except in the case of children who were in imminent danger of dying without baptism. If infant baptism had been a general practice such a question as that of Fidus would be very unlikely to have arisen.

The period of church history which we have now been reviewing was subjected to a searching investigation by Bunsen, not many years ago, with the advantage of important ancient documents then just brought to the knowledge of European scholars. He sums up the result of his investigations in the following sentences: "I think we are at this moment better able than either the defenders or the opponents

¹ Cyprian's letter to Magnus, referred to at p. 17, was written in 256, only four years after the above-mentioned letter to Fidus.

of infant baptism have hitherto been to explain how it originated. A passage in our Alexandrian Church-Book gives the true explanation of the assertion of Origen, himself an Alexandrian, that the baptism of children was an apostolical tradition; and it removes the origin of infant baptism from Tertullian and Hippolytus to the end of our present period, Cyprian being the first Father who, impelled by a fanatical enthusiasm, and assisted by a bad interpretation of the Old Testament, established it as a principle. Pedobaptism, in the more modern sense, meaning thereby baptism of newborn infants, with the vicarious promises of parents or other sponsors, was utterly unknown to the early church, not only down to the end of the second, but, indeed, to the middle of the third, century."¹ This judgment of a distinguished Pedobaptist scholar is quoted, not as authoritative, but as showing that we do not read the Fathers through sectarian spectacles.

From this time, for three centuries and more, the frequent notices of infant baptism prove plainly that it was a growing usage not yet universally received. Chrysostom complains of the neglect of it by many parents (see his *Life* by Neander, page 81). Jerome (*ad Lactam*) speaks of parents who refused to give it to their children. A Council at Carthage, in the time of Augustine, anathematized those who disputed its necessity. Julian, one of the followers of Pelagius, answers the arguments of those who opposed it. The first six Books of the Apostolical Constitutions, which are assigned by Dr. Krabbe, the author of a prize essay on these ancient documents, to the end of the third century, only mention infant baptism once, and that in the briefest manner (vi. 15). The eighth and last Book, which he assigns to the end of the fourth century, mentions it four times (chaps. 10, 12, 13, 15). Dr. Krabbe himself remarks: "it is ascertained that pedobaptism does not belong to the apostolic age."² The existence of the class called catechumens is a proof that infant baptism was not general. For these persons, who were under instruct-

¹ Hippolytus and his Age, Vol. iii. pp. 192, 180, 181.

² Prize Essay, Chase's Apostolical Constitutions, p. 410.

ion preparatory to joining the church, are addressed by the preachers of these times as having been taught the Christian religion from their childhood, and are rebuked for delaying their baptism so long. Of course these must have been children of Christian parents. The class of Homilies addressed "to those delaying baptism" is well known to the readers of patristic literature. Let Basil's Eighth Sermon on Penitence (§ 3) furnish an example of the manner in which preachers were wont to address these delaying catechumens: "Why do you loiter and deliberate and delay? Taught the word from a child, have you not yet become acquainted with the truth? Always learning, have you not yet come to knowledge? An examiner for life, a looker-on till old age, when will you become a Christian? When shall we know you as one of us?" And these very Fathers who so earnestly recommend infant baptism, though most of them were the children of Christian parents, were not one of them baptized themselves in their infancy. We have accounts of the baptism of Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, Nectarius, Ephraem of Edessa, and of the Emperors Constantius, Theodosius, and Valentinian; and all these were baptized after they had come to years of manhood. Yet most of these were born of Christian parents, and several of them (Augustine, Basil, Gregory, Ephraem) are expressly said to have been consecrated to God from their infancy. In those days, when pious parents wished to make a formal dedication of their children to God, they brought them to the altar for prayer, and not to the font for baptism. How can the defenders of infant baptism as an apostolic institution account for the fact, that among all the Christian Fathers of the first five hundred years, not one is said to have been baptized in infancy, and most are expressly said to have been baptized after they came to years of manhood. The inscriptions in the Roman catacombs have been claimed as witnesses for infant baptism; but there are only three inscriptions, earlier than the year 400, which speak of the baptism of children; these are dated severally 348, 371, and 374; and

the youngest of the three children was more than six and a half years old.¹

A passage in the fortieth Homily of Gregory Nazianzen on Baptism, preached about the year 356, furnishes us with a very satisfactory key to this transition period in the history of infant baptism: "But what would you say," he supposes an inquirer to ask, "concerning those who are yet infants, and insensible alike of the privation and of the grace? Shall we baptize these also?" "Yes, by all means; at least, if any danger is impending; for it is better that they should be sanctified without being sensible of it, than that they should depart out of the world unsealed and uninitiated. And the eighth day circumcision is an argument for this, since it was a kind of typical seal, and was applied to those who were yet without understanding. And so is also the anointing of the door-posts, which preserved the first born by means of things insensible. But as for the others [i.e. those who are not exposed to any impending danger], my judgment is, to wait till they are three years old, or a little less or more, when they will be able to hear some secret instruction, and to respond." From this passage we learn that infant baptism was not at that time a universal practice, but one in regard to which there were different opinions among Christians; that its advocates rested it on the ground of the necessity of baptism as a means of sanctification and salvation; that it was insisted on only in cases of danger; that in all other cases it was thought better to wait until the child became old enough to be examined, and to be baptized upon its own profession of faith. In a word, we have here all the marks of a transition period, in which infant baptism had begun to take the place of the baptism of professing believers. Gregory advises a different course from that pursued by his parents when he was a child. And still, he so qualifies his advice as to indicate that the Christian mind was not yet prepared to repudiate the idea that baptism was in its nature a personal

¹ See a full account of these inscriptions in *Christian Review* for October, 1863, pp. 550-560.

and intelligent profession of faith in Christ. It was but a pitiful mockery of such a profession, indeed, when a child three years old was trained to repeat a few sacred words, — to recite the creed, perhaps, or to renounce the devil and all his works, with the pomps and vanities of the world; but it was enough to show that there was still a lingering respect for the original law of baptism. This passage thus confirms Bunsen's view of the early baptisms of the preceding century; and, at the same time, it marks the progress which had been made in a hundred and fifty years in the departure from primitive Christianity: then it was boys and girls from six to ten years of age, who professed their faith in baptism; now it is little children only about three years old.

We feel no difficulty, therefore, when we are called upon to explain the rise, growth, and prevalence of infant baptism. Christian antiquity furnishes us with all the required data for answering this challenge. It is well known that the besetting tendency of human nature to cling to the material and sensuous was illustrated, even in the life-time of the apostles, in the exaggerated importance attributed to outward rites; and that this tendency developed itself still more rapidly after these inspired teachers and guides were taken away from the church. This made it easy to put such an interpretation upon John iii. 5, as to establish the dogma of the necessity of baptism in order to salvation. And this dogma once accepted, no Christian parent would willingly allow his child to die unbaptized. Still, the scripture requisition of an intelligent profession of faith in Christ as a prerequisite to baptism was so plain that it would not be forgotten or ignored all at once; the attempt would be made to reconcile the two kinds of baptism as far as possible, by retaining the form of a personal profession, but hastening it more and more, till at last it came to be but the mere articulation, by rote, of words which conveyed no understood sense to the mind of the child three years old; and then it would matter little how soon this delusive form of a profession was dropped altogether, or transferred to the lips of a sponsor.

Now the notices of the baptism of young children, scattered through three or four centuries, from the close of the second to the beginning of the sixth, exactly conform to this supposition, and so decisively confirm its truth. The fact of the gradual growth of infant baptism is accounted for by the known tendencies and beliefs of the times, and the particular passages in which the baptism of children is referred to by the Christian Fathers are all satisfactorily explained and harmonized.

On the other hand, if we suppose that infant baptism was a part of primitive Christianity, we are met by formidable and, as it seems to us, insuperable difficulties. How shall we explain the wide-spread neglect, nay, so far as the evidence goes, the utter abandonment, of the practice for at least two hundred years? How shall we account for this unscriptural (on this supposition) anti-ritualism during a period confessedly characterized by the prevalence of an excessive and unscriptural ritualism? How shall we explain the fact, that when the long neglected practice came to be revived its advocates never appealed to primitive usage in support of it, — never represented it as a return to the original custom?

The Baptist theory has to account for the rise of infant baptism; and it does so in a way which accords with the known tendencies and principles of the times, and explains the discordant utterances and usages of the early centuries. The Pedobaptist theory has a double work to do: to explain, first, the strange neglect of infant baptism for two centuries, in opposition to the known tendencies of the period; and then the subsequent revival of it under circumstances which bear every mark of being the gradual introduction of a new custom, rather than the restoration of a neglected one.

We should not fully justify the earnestness of our protest against infant baptism if we did not subject it to one more test. We have judged it by scripture and church history; we judge it, once more, by its fruits. And it seems to us to bring forth evil fruit, in the corruption of the church and

the ruin of souls. We must not let our Pedobaptist brethren misunderstand us on this point. If we judged the practice only by what we see of it in certain evangelical sects in Protestant countries, especially if we judged it only by what we see of it in the denomination most intimately related to this theological journal, we might well hesitate to hold it responsible for the corruption of the church and the perdition of souls. Here we see it practised by a body of Christians who are strict in requiring evidence of regeneration as a condition of full church membership, who maintain a scriptural discipline in their churches, and who have not been surpassed, probably, by any body of Christians in ancient or modern times, in pure morality, intelligent piety, home religion, evangelical faith, Christian activity, and missionary zeal. It is not among such a people that we expect to find the legitimate fruits of infant baptism. It exists still among them; but it exists under peculiar, exceptional, and counteracting conditions and influences. It exists in connection with an evangelical theology not congenial with it, but antagonistic. Had the Christians of the first five centuries steadfastly held the scriptural doctrines which these our brethren hold, infant baptism could never have grown up among them. Whether it can maintain a permanent existence in connection with this evangelical theology may well admit of doubt. We see, in fact, that while it is losing ground every year among evangelical Protestants, this change is going on most rapidly among those sects that are most thoroughly Protestant and evangelical. We see, also, that attempts to revive and re-invigorate the declining custom are commonly connected with a manifest tendency to adopt less evangelical views,—to magnify the efficacy of rites, and depreciate the importance of spiritual regeneration, to exalt ecclesiasticism at the expense of individualism, tradition at the expense of scripture, and to pronounce more positively in favor of the church membership of baptized children.

We look away from such exceptional, abnormal manifestations of infant baptism, and judge it, rather, by the fruits

which it brings forth where it has long existed without counteraction or modification. We judge it by its effects upon Christendom for centuries, and by its effects still where it stands upon its original foundation, and exists in connection with its original concomitants. That foundation is, the necessity of baptism to salvation, and its efficacy as an *opus operatum*; those concomitants are, the church membership of all the baptized, and their amenableness to church discipline, resulting in the invasion of the rights of conscience, and the enforcement of uniformity by persecution, the alliance of the church with the state, the transformation of the church into a worldly organization, composed of worldly elements, vitalized by a worldly spirit, and used for worldly ends. There never was any question in ancient times in regard to the status of baptized children. When infant baptism introduced the world into the church, and so made the two identical, it accepted the consequences of its act. All the baptized were regarded as within the pale of the church, subject, on the one hand, to its discipline, entitled, on the other, to its privileges. Infant communion, as is well known, always accompanied infant baptism, was advocated by the same Fathers on the same ground of necessity to salvation, was retained in the Western church until about the twelfth century, not condemned, but only declared unnecessary, by the Council of Trent in the sixteenth, and is still retained in the Eastern church. We hold that there is no warrant in scripture, any more than in Christian antiquity, for making any condition prerequisite to communion which is not equally prerequisite to baptism, excepting baptism itself. And hence we charge infant baptism with corrupting the church and deluding souls to their ruin, by making the church identical with the world, and, at the same time, encouraging the ungodly in the fatal belief that their baptism has done something to make their standing with God more hopeful; that the church, which has undertaken to be responsible for them, will not suffer them to be finally lost. It is no extravagant fancy, but a sober and melancholy certainty, that myriads of

the impenitent and ungodly are to-day cherishing just this false and fatal hope.

Such are the views which we hold in regard to the act and the subjects of Christian baptism. These views separate us from many with whom we happily agree in other respects. We are heartily sorry for this result. But with the light which we have, the argument seems so plain, and these differences so important, that we are constrained to abide by all the unpleasant consequences of our position, and to be Baptists.

ARTICLE III.

REVELATION AND INSPIRATION.

BY REV. E. F. BARROWS, D.D., LATELY PROFESSOR OF HEBREW LITERATURE
IN ANDOVER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

No. III.

GENUINENESS OF THE GOSPEL NARRATIVES.

IN the two preceding numbers we examined some false assumptions against the supernatural in the sphere of nature, and revelation in the sphere of mind. The survey was of necessity very cursory. We could only indicate certain lines of argument, the exhaustive development of which would expand itself into volumes. It is not on the side of hyper-orthodoxy alone that a "pestilent metaphysics" has been employed. There is current at the present day a *destructive* metaphysics, whose grand aim is to throw doubt and suspicion on all our primitive intuitions, and thus to unsettle all truth — especially all moral and religious truth — at its very foundations, and which is abundantly employed in the service of a false cosmology, a false anthropology and psychology, and a false theology. This must be met on its own ground by a true *constructive* metaphysics. But we cannot pause to attempt this work in its details. We plant our feet firmly on the great primal truth that there is a