

grieved when you are unavoidably prevented; that you will really take pleasure in the public exercise of devotion, and will rejoice to resort to the house of God "with the voice of praise and "thanksgiving, with the multitude that keep holy "day."

## SERMON IX.

### BAPTISMAL VOW.

DEUT. iv. 23.

Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the Lord your God.

ALTHOUGH God the eternal Spirit is to be worshipped with a spiritual worship, yet the devotion of the mind may be assisted by sensible objects. It has accordingly pleased the divine Author of our religion to appoint certain significant rites to be the means of conveying to us God's grace, while at the same time they have in themselves a natural tendency to excite and strengthen a religious frame and temper of soul. Such rites are the two sacraments: for by the word sacrament, you know, is meant "an outward and visible sign"—a sign that may be seen—"of an inward and spiritual grace "given unto us;" which sign must have been "ordained" or appointed "by Christ himself, as a "means whereby we receive such grace, and as a "pledge" or token "to assure us" that we do receive it. The only two sacraments thus appointed by Christ, are Baptism and the Lord's Supper; both of which are declared by our Church to be "generally necessary to salvation," necessary to the salvation of all those who have it in their power to partake of them.

The first of these sacraments is Baptism. The necessity of Baptism appears to arise from the lost state in which man is by nature. The natural state of man is repeatedly called in Scripture "the flesh." Our Saviour says, "that which is born of the flesh is flesh;"<sup>a</sup> St. Paul assures us, "that they that are in the flesh cannot please God;"<sup>b</sup> and tells the Ephesians, that they had heretofore been "dead in trespasses and sins;"<sup>c</sup> had been "the children of wrath even as others."<sup>c</sup> Accordingly, our Church begins her office for public Baptism with reminding the congregation "that all men are conceived and born in sin, and that our Saviour Christ saith, none can enter the kingdom of heaven except he be born anew of water and of the Holy Ghost." This plainly refers to our Lord's conference with Nicodemus, in which he says, "Except a man be born again—born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."<sup>d</sup> The rite of Baptism had been before in use among the Jews; and that they were supposed not to be ignorant of its spiritual signification, we may infer from our Lord's saying to Nicodemus, "Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things?" When St. John came as the harbinger of the Messiah, he came baptizing those who repented of their sins. And our Lord himself, though he needed it not, yet submitted to be baptized, in order that he might fulfil all righteousness. And when the time came that the Christian religion was to be preached throughout the world, he adopted the rite of Baptism as the means of admission to the privileges of the Gospel. Thus, in his commission to the Apostles to make disciples of all nations, he charged them, to baptize them

<sup>a</sup> John iii. 6.<sup>c</sup> Ephes. ii. 1, &c.<sup>b</sup> Rom. viii. 8.<sup>d</sup> John iii. 3, 5.

"in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."<sup>e</sup> From that time to the present, Baptism, the washing of regeneration, has been the instrument of admission into the Church of Christ; and thus our Catechism instructs us, that in Baptism "we change a state of wrath for a state of grace; that in Baptism we are made members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven." Members of the Church of Christ have an interest in the promises made to that Church, in the promise of the Spirit among the rest. The offices for Baptism, accordingly, consider the baptized person as being made God's own child by adoption, as being regenerate.<sup>f</sup>

<sup>e</sup> Matt. xxviii. 19.

<sup>f</sup> The benefits of Baptism being so great, and its necessity so apparent, it is very right and fitting that parents should take an early opportunity of bringing their children to the baptismal font. The Prayer Book says, that "children who are baptized, dying before they commit actual sin, are undoubtedly saved;" consequently, a parent, who for a long time wilfully defers the Baptism of his child, acts as if he were regardless of its soul's health. You will not think that there is any impropriety in entering into covenant with God *infants*, who, from their tender age, cannot understand the conditions of that covenant, if you bear in mind that God himself appointed, that, under the Old Testament dispensation, children should be entered into covenant with him by the sacrament of Circumcision, when they were only eight days old. Now, the Christian sacrament of Baptism appears to stand in the place of the Jewish sacrament of Circumcision; like that it is the instituted means of entering into covenant with God; and certainly there is no reason why it should not be administered at an equally early age. Little children, we know, are in the Gospel peculiarly invited to come to Christ; who "was much displeased with those who would have kept them from him." "Suffer little children," said he, "to come unto me, and forbade them not, for of such is the kingdom of God." If children were capable of being the peculiar objects of Christ's care and attention, and peculiarly fitted to be members of his kingdom, surely they are capable of being admitted into covenant with him by Baptism. When we read of the Apostles

I am fully persuaded that none of you can be so ignorant as to suppose that this glorious inheritance, in the case, I mean, of those who come to years of discretion, is forced upon us, whether we will accept it or not. You all well know, that the title to it is conferred upon the condition of our fulfilling our part of the agreement; upon the condition that we adhere to the vow and promise into which we then entered. And I am persuaded also, that you cannot help seeing, that if a man of mature years lives in the neglect of his baptismal vow, his baptism, so far from being of any use to him, must rather increase his condemnation; must increase it, inasmuch as he is guilty of despising the offered mercy of God, guilty of deserting or drawing back from a solemn vow. I am satisfied that you cannot help seeing and allowing this. Suffer me, then, to direct your attention to a few particulars in your vow of Baptism, and to entreat you to consider seriously, whether you have kept it or not. This, I am sensible, is a trite and common subject, but there is no subject more useful, no subject which more requires to be again and again insisted on.

You engaged, then, in the first place, "to renounce the devil and all his works; the pomps and vanity of this wicked world; and all the sin-

baptizing whole households, it is fair to infer that the children in their families were not excluded. Again, St. Paul represents the children of believing parents as being *holy*; and if *holy*, certainly not incapable of being made members of the Church of God by Baptism; but probably called *holy* for this very reason, because they had been sanctified or made *holy* by the washing of regeneration. For all these reasons, supported by the constant and uniform practice of the Church of Christ from the earliest ages, we hold, in the language of the 27th article, that "the baptism of young children is in any wise to be retained in the Church, as most agreeable with the institution of Christ."

"ful lusts of the flesh." Have you adhered to this engagement? Have you in reality thus renounced the three great enemies of man's salvation?

The devil, you know, is the author of sin. His peculiar works are pride, envy, malice, lying, and tempting men to transgress against God. Have you carefully avoided all these works of the devil? To be lifted up with *pride* especially is the way to "fall into the condemnation of the devil."<sup>s</sup> Are we free from pride? Are we humble in mind, and lowly in our behaviour both towards God and man? Again; *envy* is said by a wise, though uninspired writer, to be one of the characteristics of the great enemy; "through envy of the devil came death into the world."<sup>h</sup> Do we ever secretly repine at the good which happens to a neighbour? When we see another, whom our pride perhaps tempts to regard as less deserving than ourselves, in prosperous circumstances, and getting on in the world, while we continue in a poor and low condition, do we feel no lurking grudge, no emotion of envy? Do you feel no such emotions when you see or hear of a poor neighbour partaking of bounty from which you derive no benefit? If you do you have not forsaken the works of the devil.

To bear any *malice* or *hatred* in our hearts; to wish to be revenged upon those who, as we think, have injured us, is to partake of the character of him who is made up of malice, and who "was a murderer from the beginning."<sup>i</sup> If, therefore, you wish to keep your baptismal vow, avoid carefully every feeling of hatred or malice, every desire of revenge.

Nothing is more directly the work of the devil than *lying*; for he, we are told by our Lord, is a liar, and the father of lies.<sup>k</sup> If ever, therefore, you

<sup>s</sup> 1 Tim. iii. 6.    <sup>h</sup> Wisdom ii. 24.    <sup>i</sup> John viii. 44.    <sup>k</sup> Ibid.

are guilty of lying; if either the fear of suffering, or the hope of gain, or any other motive whatever, should induce you to be guilty of wilful falsehood, you are guilty of doing one of the works of the devil, and consequently of breaking your baptismal vow.

Still more, if possible, are you chargeable with this guilt, if not content with sinning against God yourself, you do the office of the tempter, and try to prevail on others to do what you and they know to be wrong; if you seduce them into drunkenness, or unchastity, or profaneness, or any other violation of the divine law.

You renounce, in the second place, "the pomps and vanity of this wicked world." The world has numberless methods of tempting us to desert our fidelity to God. I will not pretend to mention them all, but will call your attention to one or two of the most dangerous of them. Do we then never fall in with the stream, with the common practice and manners of those around us, without considering whether it is warranted or not by the commandments of God? Do we never suffer the dread of the ridicule or the laughter of men, the fear of being thought or called singular or precise, to frighten us from serious religion, from what we feel and know to be our duty? If we are guilty of such unmanly cowardice, we should remember and tremble at the words of our Saviour—"Whosoever shall be ashamed of me, and of my words," whosoever shall be ashamed of religion, "in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Our fidelity to God is endangered both by the men of the world, and by the things of the world.

<sup>1</sup> Mark viii. 38.

If we have escaped the danger arising from the former, how do we stand with regard to the latter? The cares and business of this life may lawfully be attended to, and ought to be attended to, in due subordination to the care of the soul. But, do we never suffer them to occupy the first place in our attention? Do we never suffer them to make us neglect religion? never suffer them to choke the work of God, and render it unfruitful? Remember, if, when the service of God calls you one way, you deliberately permit the service of the world to lead you in the opposite direction, you take the world for your master rather than the Almighty; you are the servants of Mammon, not the servants of the living God; you are the slaves of that world which at your Baptism you solemnly renounced.

You renounced also all the sinful lusts of the flesh. If you ask what these are, St. Paul tells you in the 5th chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians. "Works of the flesh," says he, "are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, and such like." Carefully read over this passage, and reflect seriously, that if you have been guilty of any of these works of the flesh, you have broken your baptismal vow. The sin of fornication, all instances of unchastity, are spoken of in Scripture as peculiarly repugnant to the Christian profession, as peculiarly dangerous in their consequences. *Wrath* or immoderate anger, *variance* or quarrelling, and *drunkenness*, are also, you will observe, classed among those works of the flesh which are violations of the baptismal covenant, and which exclude those who are guilty of them from the kingdom of God.

The second great branch of your engagement

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was, "belief in all the articles of the Christian faith." These are shortly brought together in the Apostles' Creed. Consider now how far you understand, and really believe, the several articles which that Creed contains.

The most important of them are, belief in God the Father, who created; in God the Son, who redeemed; and in God the Holy Ghost, who sanctifieth you. Have you sincerely embraced, and do you steadfastly hold these fundamental articles of faith? Do you really believe in God the Father, who made you and all the world? Do you preserve upon your minds a constant sense of his presence; and are you guided in all you do, say, or think, by a general view to his will and his glory? Do you effectually believe in God the Son, who redeemed you and all mankind? Are you really persuaded in your heart, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, did, by his death upon the cross, make satisfaction for your sins, and the sins of the whole world? Have you a thankful remembrance of his death; and do you show your thankfulness, not with your lips only, but in your life?

Do you believe in God the Holy Ghost, who sanctifieth you, and all the elect people of God? Are you sensible that your nature is so weak and corrupted, that you cannot do any thing that is acceptable to God without the aid of his Spirit; and do you seek for that aid in fervent prayer to him who giveth his Holy Spirit to them that ask him? Do you seek it also in the diligent use of the other means of grace, particularly in the participation of the Lord's Supper?

In the third place, you engaged to "keep God's holy will and commandments, and to walk in the same all the days of your life." Have you fulfilled this part of your engagement? What the commandments of God are you well know. Many

of those which forbid the commission of sin, I have touched upon in the former part of this discourse. With regard to those commandments which enjoin religious dispositions and religious duties, ask your own consciences whether you love and serve God as you ought to do? Whether you treat his name with reverence, never taking it in vain, or in any way profaning it? Consider whether you keep holy the Lord's day; whether you are dutiful and obedient to parents, and to magistrates, and all that are in authority; whether you are careful to keep your hands from picking and stealing, your tongue from evil speaking, lying, and slandering; whether you are contented in that state of life in which the providence of God has placed you. If you live in the wilful neglect of any of God's commandments; if you are in the habit of swearing; in the habit of neglecting church, and the duties of the Lord's day; if you are guilty of reviling, or of evil speaking, or of any other sin against the divine law; you have broken your baptismal vow, have gone back from your baptismal engagements, and have become exposed to the curse which is threatened to all those who wilfully "go astray from the commandments of God."

Consider well, my friends, what has been said. Revolve it again and again in your minds, and beseech God to bring it home to your hearts and consciences. You sometimes probably hear and read of men's being converted or unconverted, being renewed or unrenewed, and many like expressions. All these expressions come in fact to the same thing; and all questions respecting them are answered by the answer to the inquiry which I have endeavoured to press upon you—Are you sincerely endeavouring to fulfil your baptismal vow, or are you living in neglect of it? If you are habitually mindful of your baptismal covenant, and

wish, and sincerely try, to live according to it, with earnest prayer for God's grace to enable you to do so, you are converted,<sup>m</sup> are renewed, are in a state of grace, in a state of justification. If you habitually neglect it, or have wilfully drawn back, and continue to draw back from it, you are unrenewed, and in a state of condemnation.

If you faithfully keep to the engagements into which you entered at the font; if you endeavour to renounce the sins of the devil, the world, and the flesh; if you sincerely believe all the articles of the Christian faith, even though your faith be weak; and if it is the desire and purpose of your heart to keep God's holy will and commandments, and to walk in the same all the days of your life, even though your obedience is marked with much imperfection; if, I say, this is the case, then happy are ye. Your interest in the privileges conferred at Baptism remains firm. Humbly beg God to keep you in this state, and seek for the confirmation and increase of all spiritual blessings, by devoutly partaking of the table of the Lord. But if, on the other hand, you unhappily have habitually broken, and are still living in the neglect of your baptismal vow, let me entreat you, before it is too late, to think upon the dangerous condition you are in. You have forsaken the guide of your youth, and broken the covenant of your God. You have deserted the standard under which you were enlisted to war; have drawn back from the engagements into which you had entered. Remember, that they that draw back forfeit the favour of Almighty God—his soul can have no pleasure in them—and that they that

<sup>m</sup> By the term *conversion*, I mean a *turning*—a turning from sin to God, the turning from the evil of our doings, the turning away from wickedness, and doing that which is lawful and right.

draw back, "draw back unto perdition."<sup>n</sup> Reflect upon the awful warning of the Apostle in the Epistle to the Hebrews—"He that despised Moses' law, "died without mercy under two or three witnesses: "of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall "he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under "foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood "of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an "unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the "Spirit of grace."<sup>o</sup> To this sore punishment, my friends, all those are exposed who live in habitual and wilful neglect of their baptismal engagements. If you are of the number of such, let me entreat you, ere it is too late, to reflect upon the danger hanging over your heads. "Escape for "your life, for evil is before you." Flee instantly from the wrath to come, and labour to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. And because through the weakness of our mortal nature we can do no good thing without God, let us apply to him for grace and help in time of need. Let us say, "Turn "thou us, O good Lord, and so shall we be turn- "ed;" and let us implore him to grant unto us the aid of the Holy Ghost, to create in us a new heart, and renew a right spirit within us, to enable us for the future to keep steadily to our baptismal engagement, and to preserve us from again going back from it.

<sup>n</sup> Heb. x. 39.

<sup>o</sup> Heb. x. 28, 29.