

HOW OUGHT WE TO IMPROVE OUR BAPTISM?

Be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins.—ACTS II. 38.

THIS chapter gives us an account of the pouring out of the Spirit, according to promise, presently after Christ's ascension. As soon as the Spirit was poured out, the apostles were enabled to speak in various languages, to the astonishment and wonder of the hearers. This was for the glory of God, the confirmation of the gospel, and to authorise them as special messengers sent by Christ.

At the sight of this miracle some wonder, others mock, as if this speaking with divers tongues had been a confused jabbering that proceeded from the fumes of wine, rather than the gift and operation of the Holy Spirit.

To satisfy both, Peter declares in a sermon the effect and intent of the miracle, proving Jesus, whom they had crucified, to be Lord and Christ. When they heard this, many of the most obstinate among them were 'pricked at the heart,' and relented. A happy sermon it was that Peter preached, it brought in thousands of souls to Christ; the first handful of the power of the Spirit and success of the gospel.

It is good to observe what course they took for ease and relief after this piercing and brokenness of heart; they 'said to Peter, and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?' This is the usual question of men under a sound and thorough conviction.

To their serious question Peter makes a seasonable answer, ver. 38. It is the part of a good physician not only to discover the disease, but also to prescribe a remedy; especially should spiritual physicians be tender of broken-hearted sinners, and willing and ready to give them counsel.

In Peter's direction and counsel to them, observe—(1.) What he persuades them to do. (2.) By what motive and argument; what they should do, and what they should receive.

In the advice, he persuades them to repentance, and to be baptized in the name of Christ. The latter we are upon.

For explaining it, we may inquire:—

Quest. 1. Why is baptism mentioned, rather than faith and other things more internal and necessary to salvation?

I answer—(1.) Certainly faith is implied; for, Mark xvi. 16, 'He

that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.' Baptism is an open and real profession of Christ crucified; so that, 'Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ' is as much as be 'Baptized, *believing* on the name of the Lord Jesus, for the remission of sins.' (2.) Baptism is mentioned because it was the visible rite of receiving proselytes to Christ. Now, it imported them who were convinced as persecutors to turn professors, if they would have ease for their consciences; and therefore not only to believe with the heart, but to make open profession of faith in Christ, Rom. x. 10.

Quest. 2. Why in the name of Christ only? The Father and the Holy Ghost are not mentioned, according to the prescript form, Mat. xxviii. 19. I answer—He speaks not of the form of baptism, but the use and end thereof. Now, the great use of baptism is that we may have benefit by the mystery of redemption by Christ; therefore, elsewhere we are said to be 'baptized into Jesus Christ,' Rom. vi. 3; and to 'put on Christ,' Gal. iii. 27. He is the head of the church, and by baptism we are planted into his mystical body.

This being premised, my work shall be to show what use and respect baptism has unto this benefit of obtaining remission of sins by Jesus Christ. I shall do it in these considerations:—

1. That God hath ever delighted to deal with his creatures in the way of a covenant, that we might know what to expect from him, and might look upon ourselves as under the firmer bonds of obedience to his blessed majesty. In a covenant, which is the most solemn transaction between man and man, both parties are engaged—God to us, and we to God. It is not meet that one party should be bound and the other free; therefore both are bound to each other, God to bless and we to obey. Indeed, in the first covenant, the *debitum pœnæ* is only mentioned, because that only took place: Gen. ii. 17, 'In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.' But the other part is implied, and it doth in effect speak thus much, 'Do and live, sin and die.'

2. Because the first covenant was broken on our part, God was pleased to enter into a second, wherein he would manifest the glory of his redeeming grace and pardoning mercy to fallen man; this was brought about in Christ: 2 Cor. v. 19, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself;' and therefore this second covenant is called a 'covenant of peace,' as being made with us after the breach, and when man was obnoxious to the wrath of God: Isa. liv. 10, 'The covenant of my peace shall not be removed.' Man needeth such a covenant, and God, appeased by Christ, offereth it to us.

3. In this covenant of peace, the privileges and duties are suited to the state in which man was when God invited him into covenant with himself. Man was fallen from his duty, and obnoxious to the wrath and displeasure of God; and therefore the new covenant is a doctrine of repentance and remission of sins. What is 'preach the gospel to every creature,' Mark xvi. 16, is in Luke xxiv. 47, 'that repentance and remission of sin should be preached in his name among all nations;' for that is the gospel, or the new remedial law of our Lord Jesus: repentance to heal us and set us in joint again as to our duty; remission of sins, to recover us into God's favour. Both these benefits

we have by the Redeemer : Acts v. 31, ' Him hath God exalted to give repentance and remission of sins to Israel ;' he giveth the one simply, and both giveth and requireth the other ; so that, by the new covenant, remission of sins is conveyed to all true penitents.

4. More distinctly to understand the tenor of this new and second covenant, we must consider both the duties and the privileges thereof ; for in every covenant there is *ratio dati et accepti*—there is something promised and given, and something required ; and usually the promise consists of somewhat which the party is willing of, and the duty or condition required of that to which he is more backward and loath to submit. So in the covenant of grace, in the promise God respects man's want, in the duty his own honour. Every man would have pardon and be saved from hell, but God will have subjection ; even corrupt nature is not against desires of happiness ; these God makes use of to gain us to holiness. All men readily catch at felicity, and would have impunity, peace, comfort, glory, but are unwilling to deny the flesh, to renounce the credit, profit, or pleasure of sin, or to grow dead to the world and worldly things. Now God promiseth what we desire, on condition that we will submit to those things that we are against : as we sweeten bitter pills to children, that they may swallow them the better ; they love the sugar though they loathe the aloes. So doth God invite us to our duty by our interest. Therefore whosoever would enter into the gospel-state must resolve to take the blessings and benefits offered for his happiness, and the duties required for his work. Indeed, accepting of the benefits is a part of the condition, because we treat with an invisible God about a happiness that lieth in another world ; but it is but part, there are other terms, and therefore we must ' draw nigh with a true heart, in full assurance of faith,' Heb. x. 22. With a true heart, resolving upon the duties of the covenant, in full assurance of faith, depending upon God's word that he will give us the blessings.

5. The privileges are two—pardon and life. These are the great blessings offered in the new covenant ; you have them both together, Acts xxvi. 18, ' To turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God ; that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith.' These two benefits are most necessary, the one to allay the fears of the guilty creature, and the other to gratify desires of happiness, which are natural to us ; the one to remedy the misery incurred by sin and the fall of man, the other to establish our true and proper felicity in the everlasting enjoyment of God ; the one to ease our consciences, and support us against troubles of mind, the other to comfort us against the outward troubles and afflictions which sin hath introduced into the world. In short, the one to free us from deserved punishment, the other to assure us of undeserved blessedness ; the one importeth deliverance from eternal death, and the other entrance into eternal life.

6. The duties thereof do either concern our first entrance into the Christian state, or our progress therein. Our Lord representeth it under the notions of the ' gate,' and the ' way,' Mat. vii. 14, ' Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life.' Other scriptures deliver it under the notions of making covenant, and keep-

ing covenant with God : making covenant, Ps. l. 5 ; keeping covenant, Ps. xxv. 10, Ps. ciii. 18. The covenant must not only be made, but kept.

[1.] As to entering into covenant with God, there is required true repentance and faith : Mark i. 15, 'Repent, and believe the gospel.' Repentance respects God as our end ; faith respects Christ as the great means or way to the Father : Acts xx. 21, 'Repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.' God is our end, for Christ 'died to bring us to God,' 1 Peter iii. 18 ; and Christ is our way, John xiv. 6 ; and whole of Christianity is a coming to God by Christ, Heb. vii. 25. Now, in our first entrance faith and repentance are both mixed ; and it is hard to sever them, and show what belongs to the one, and what to the other ; at least it would perplex the discourse. Both together imply that a man be turned from a life of sin to God by faith in Christ, or a renouncing the devil, the world, and the flesh, and devoting and dedicating himself to God.

(1.) A renouncing of the devil, the world, and the flesh ; for these are the three great enemies of God and our salvation : Eph. ii. 2, 3, 'In time past ye walked according to the course of this world, after the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that works now in the children of disobedience, among whom also we had our conversation in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind.' There all our enemies appear abreast : the devil, as the grand deceiver and principle of all wickedness ; the world, with its pleasures, honours, and profits, as the bait by which it doth deceive us, and steal away our hearts from God, and pervert and divert us, that we should not look after the one thing necessary ; the flesh is that corrupt inclination in us which entertains and closeth with these temptations, to the neglect of God and the wrong of our own souls ; this is very importunate to be pleased, and is the proper internal cause of all our mischief ; for James i. 14, 'Every man is enticed and drawn away by his own lust.' These must be renounced before we can return to God ; for till we put away our idols we cannot incline our hearts to the true God, Josh. xxiv. 23. And these are the great idols by which our hearts are estranged from him. When God is laid aside, self interposeth as the next heir, and that which we count self is the flesh. Many wrong their own souls, but never any man hated his own flesh. That which feeds the flesh is the world ; and the devil, by proposing the bait, irritateth and stirreth up our affections. Therefore we must be turned from Satan to God ; we must be delivered from the present evil world ; we must abstain from fleshly lusts, for God will have no copartners and competitors in our hearts.

(2.) A devoting and giving up ourselves to God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as our God, 2 Cor. viii. 3, and Rom. vi. 13 ; as our owner by creation, Ps. c. 3 ; and by redemption, 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20 ; as our sovereign lord, Jer. xxiv. 8, Isa. xxvi. 13, 'Other lords besides thee have had dominion over us,' &c. ; as the fountain of our life and blessedness : Ps. xxxi. 14, 'I trusted in the Lord, I said, Thou art my God ;' Lam. iii. 24, 'The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in him ;' Ps. cxix. 57, 'I have said, Thou art my portion, therefore I will keep thy precepts.'

[2.] As to our progress and perseverance, which is our walking in the narrow way, and shows the sincerity and heartiness of our consent in making the covenant—and besides, this is not the work of a day, but of our whole lives—we have continual need of coming to God by Christ. Here three things are required:—

(1.) As to the enemies of God and our souls, there must be a forsaking as well as a renouncing: the devil must be forsaken; we must be no more of his party and confederacy; we must resist, stand out against all his batteries and assaults, 1 Peter v. 8, 9; the world must be overcome, 1 John v. 4, 5; and the flesh must be subdued and mortified, Gal. v. 24, that we be no more governed by the desires thereof, and if we be sometimes foiled, we must not go back again, but renew our resolutions; and the drift of our lives must still be for God and heaven.

(2.) As to God, to whom we have devoted ourselves, we must love and please and serve him all our days, Luke i. 75. We must make it our work to love him, and count it our happiness to be beloved by him, and carefully apply ourselves to seek his favour, and cherish a fresh sense of it upon our hearts, and continue with patience in well-doing, Rom. ii. 7, till we come to the complete sight and love of him in heaven, 1 John iii. 2.

(3.) You must always live in the hope of the coming of Christ, and everlasting glory: Titus ii. 13, 'Looking for the blessed hope;' and Jude 21, 'Looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus unto eternal life.' As we did at first thankfully accept of our recovery by Christ, and at first consent to renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh, and resolve to follow God's counsel and direction, we must still persevere in this mind, and use his appointed means in order to our final happiness. The sum, then, of our Christianity is, that we should by true repentance and faith forsake the world, the flesh, and the devil, and give up ourselves to God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, that he may take us for his reconciled children, and, for Christ's sake, forgive all our sins; and by his Spirit give us grace to persevere in those resolutions, till our full and final happiness come in hand.

7. This covenant, consisting of such duties and privileges as God hath confirmed by certain visible ordinances, commonly called sacraments, as baptism and the Lord's Supper; both which, but in a different manner, respect the whole tenor of the covenant. For as the covenant bindeth mutually on God's part and ours, so these duties have a mutual aspect or respect to what God does, and what we must do. On God's part they are a sign and a seal, on our part they are a badge and a bond.

[1.] On God's part they are sealing or confirming signs. As circumcision is called, 'a sign' or 'seal of the righteousness which is by faith,' Rom. iv. 11; that is, of the grace offered to us in Christ; so is baptism, which came in the room of circumcision: Col. ii. 11, 12, 'In whom ye are circumcised, buried with him in baptism.' Surely the gospel ordinances signify as much grace as the ordinances of the legal covenant. If circumcision was a sign and seal of the righteousness which is by faith, or a pledge of God's good-will to us in Christ, so is baptism, so is the Lord's Supper; they are a sign to signify and a seal to confirm, to represent the grace and assure the grant of pardon and life. As, for instance, baptism signifies pardon and life, so does the

Lord's Supper, Mat. xxvi. 28, 29 ; that for our growth and nourishment, this for our initiation. Baptism is under our consideration at present, that it hath respect to remission of sins. The text is clear for it, and so are many other scriptures. It was Ananias' advice to Paul, Acts xxii. 16, 'Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, and call on the name of the Lord.' So Eph. v. 26, 'That he might sanctify and cleanse us by the washing of water through the word.' The washing represents the washing away the guilt and filth of sin ; it signifies also our resurrection to a blessed and eternal life. Baptism saveth by the resurrection of Christ, 1 Peter iii. 21. Well, then, it is a sealing sign. When God promised longer life to Hezekiah, 2 Kings xx. 8, he said, 'What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me?' So when he promiseth pardon and life to us, What shall be the sign that the Lord will do this for us? Baptism is this sign ; a witness between us and God : Gen. xxxi. 48, 'This heap is a witness between thee and me.'

[2.] On our part they are a badge and a bond to oblige us to the duties of the covenant—a badge of the profession, and a bond to engage us to the duties which that profession calls for. As the apostle speaks of circumcision, that 'whosoever is circumcised is a debtor to the whole law,' Gal. v. 3, binds himself to the observances of Moses ; so a Christian, by being baptized, becomes a debtor, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh, &c., Rom. viii. 12. And it is called 'an answer towards God,' 1 Peter iii. 21 ; the answer supposes the demands of the covenant ; and so it is an undertaking faithfully to perform the conditions required of us, a vow or an obligation whereby we reckon ourselves bound to 'die unto sin, and live unto righteousness, through Jesus Christ our Lord,' Rom. vi. 11. It bindeth us chiefly to the duties that belong to our entrance, as the Lord's Supper doth more directly to the duties which belong to our progress ; it bindeth us to a true belief of the gospel, or an acceptance of Christ, and consent to the covenant of grace ; to renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh, and to give up ourselves unto God ; and therefore the baptismal covenant, by which we are initiated into Christianity, is expressed by our being baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Mat. xxviii. 19, which implies a giving up ourselves to them in their distinct personal relations. To the Father, that we may return to him, and obey him as our rightful Lord ; that we may love him, and depend upon him as the fountain of all our good and all-sufficient happiness, and prefer his favour before all the sensual pleasures of the world. We are baptized in the name of Christ, that we may believe in him, accept him as our Saviour and Redeemer, expecting to be saved by his merits, righteousness, and intercession, from the wrath of God, and guilt of sin, and eternal death. To the Holy Ghost, as our guide, sanctifier, and comforter, that he may free us from sin, change us into the image and likeness of Christ, and lead us into all truth and godliness, and comfort us with the sense of our present interest in God's love, and the hopes of future glory.

8. These visible confirming ordinances give us great advantages above the word and bare proposal of the covenant.

[1.] As these sealing signs are an expression of God's earnest and

sincere respect to our salvation. God hath opened his mind in his word concerning his love and good-will to sinners in Christ; and he hath also added his seal, that the charter of his grace might be more valid and authentic. It argueth the goodness and communicativeness of God, to give notice in his word; but his solicitousness and anxious care for our good, to give visible assurance in the sacraments, as being willing *ἐκ περισσοῦ*, 'over and above to satisfy the heirs of promise.' If a man be more than ordinarily cautious to make all sure, it is a sign his heart is upon the thing. Surely it is a great condescension that God would dispose his grace into a covenant form; but it is a further condescension that he would add seals, which needed not on his part; but he added them to give us the more 'strong consolation.' *Nudum pactum*, a naked promise, is not so valid and authentic as when articles of agreement are put into a formal instrument and deed of law, and that signed and sealed, and interchangeably delivered; this breeds more confidence and security on both sides. God's word certifieth us of his good-will; but when he is pleased to make a formal indenture of it, and to sign it and seal it, it doth breed more assurance in our minds that his promises are made with a real intent to perform them, and bindeth us the more firmly to God, when, besides our naked promise, there is a kind of vow and oath on our part, solemnly entered into by baptism.

[2.] There is this advantage in the sacraments above the word, that they are a closer application. The word speaks to all promiscuously, as inviting; the sacrament to every one in particular, as obliging. By the word none are excluded from the grace offered upon God's terms: 'Go preach the gospel to every creature;' but by the sacrament, every one is expressly admonished of his duty. The object revealed in the word is like the brazen serpent, which without difference was exposed to the eye of all, 'that whosoever looked upon it might be healed;' but the same object offered in the sacraments is like the blood sprinkled on the door-posts, that every man might be assured that his family should be in safety. Now the reason of this difference is, because things propounded in the word are like a treaty between God and us, or an offer and a debating of matters till the parties do agree. But sacraments are not of use till both sides have agreed upon the conditions of the covenant. In adults, at least, the word conduceth to the making of the covenant, but sacraments suppose it made; therefore, the word universally propoundeth that which in the seals is particularly applied. Now those things do not affect us so much which are spoken indifferently to all, as those that are particularly applied to ourselves, because they stir us up to a more accurate care and endeavour to fulfil the duty incumbent upon us. The conditions are propounded in the word, Repent and believe, and I will pardon, and give thee eternal life. But the sacraments suppose an actual consent, that thou hast done, or undertaken to do so; and then God comes and saith, Take this as an undoubted pledge, that thou shalt have what I have promised; which doth more increase our hope and persuade our duty.

[3.] By these sealing signs we are solemnly invested into a right to the things promised, as when we are put in possession of what we have bar-

gained for by due formalities of law: 'This is my body:' that is our solemn investiture into the privileges purchased by Christ's crucified body. A believer receiveth Christ in the word, John i. 12, and he receiveth Christ in the Lord's Supper. What is the difference? There his right is solemnly owned and confirmed in the way which God hath appointed. As soon as a man consents to a bargain, he hath an interest in the thing bargained for, but the right is made more explicit when it is delivered to him by some formalities of law, as a house by a key, a field by a turf or twig; in such delivery we say, This key is my house, this turf or twig is my field. So are we put in possession of Christ by these words: 'This is my body.' Every penitent and believing sinner hath a right to Christ and pardon; but his solemn infeoffment is by the sacraments: 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you, for the remission of sins;' or, as it is, Acts xxii. 14, 'Arise and be baptized, for the washing away of thy sins.' God gave Abraham the land of promise by word of mouth; but, Gen. xiii., he bids him go through the land, and view it, and build an altar, and offer sacrifice there; then was he actually invested in the gift. God gave Israel a grant of Canaan, but the clusters of Eschol were, as it were, the livery and seisin of it. Though the gift be sufficiently made over by the promise, yet it is further ratified, and more solemnly conveyed and delivered by the sacraments.

[4.] This is one advantage more, that the great mysteries of godliness are laid before our eyes in some visible rites, and so have greater force to excite the mind to serious consideration. When God will condescend to give us help against our infirmities, it must be by the senses, by which all knowledge comes into the soul. Now feeling, smelling, tasting, seem not so fit for this, as being more gross, and conducing to the welfare of the body; but seeing and hearing convey objects to the understanding, and therefore are called the senses of discipline and learning. Now the covenant is made by words, which strike the ear; but the seals by visible things set it before our eyes, and, as the apostle saith, 'Christ is crucified among us, and evidently set forth,' Gal. iii. 1. The sight doth in a more lively manner stir up the mind than the bare hearing. Washing from sin doth fitly represent to us, and raise thoughts in us about, the sanctification of the Spirit, and so in a lively manner excite us to expect this benefit.

Use. Let us not be slight in the use and improvement of baptism; for it implieth a solemn covenanting with God, that we may obtain remission of sins, and eternal life. John the Baptist calleth it, Mark i. 4, 'The baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.' Therefore, let us reflect upon ourselves, We are all baptized, but what are we the better? Have we the more confidence of the pardon of our sins, and a greater sense of our covenant vow, to die unto sin and live unto God? We cannot have the former without the latter; both must be regarded by us. Volateranus reporteth of Lucian, that scoffing atheist, that when he revolted from the profession of Christianity, he scoffed at his baptism, saying, *Se nihil ex eo consecutum quam quod nomen ipsius esset corruptum ex Lucio, Lucianus factum*—that he got nothing by his baptism but a syllable to his name, it being changed from *Lucius* to *Lucianus*. Alas! what do most get by their baptism but a

name? It should not be so with you; you may have great advantage by it if you improve it to the ends for which it was appointed. To quicken you, consider:—

1. Baptism is a perpetual bond upon us, obliging us to repentance and holy life, Rom. vi. 4, therefore the scripture often reasoneth from it, as Rom. vi. 2, 'How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?' He argueth not *ab impossibili*, but *ab incongruo*—not from what is impossible, but what will misbecome our renewed state, which we profess to enter into by baptism, which is a vowed death to sin, and a bond wherewith we bind our souls to new obedience. So elsewhere, Col. iii. 1, 'Ye are arisen with Christ,' in the import and signification of baptism; 'therefore seek the things which are above.' And again, 'Ye are dead, therefore mortify,' &c., ver. 3–5. Once more, ver. 8, 9, 'Put off all these, seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds.' And in many other places the apostle argueth from the baptismal engagement to the effect intended and signified thereby.

2. The improvement of baptism is the best preparation for the Lord's Supper: John xiii. 8, 'If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.' That washing had a spiritual meaning; and presently after it the sacrament of Christ's body and blood was instituted, to the participation of which this spiritual washing was necessary. In the supposition, *if I wash thee not*, is implied baptism; in the commination, *thou hast no part with me*, is implied the Lord's Supper, which Christ was then about to institute. *In foro ecclesie*, before the church, none but baptized persons have a right to the Lord's table; *in foro cæli*, before God, none but those who have the fruit of baptism have right to the benefits thereof; they that are sanctified by the Spirit of Christ have only right to the benefits purchased by his blood. Our Lord would remind his disciples of this before he would admit them to his table.

3. If we improve it not, our baptism will be a witness to solicit vengeance against us; as the gospel itself is preached either 'for a witness' to us, Mat. xxiv. 14, or 'for a witness' against us, if we obey it not, Mark xiv. 9. So baptism, instead of being a witness to us, will be a witness against us if we mind it not. And in the judgment we shall fare no better than the heathen; for all the difference between us is, that they are uncircumcised in flesh, and we in heart, Jer. ix. 25, 26; they are not washed in water, and we are not cleansed from our sins. I remember a passage in Victor Uticensis concerning one Elpidophorus, who had revolted from Catholicism to the Vandal Arians: the deacon who had baptized him showed him the stole, or linen clothes in which he was baptized, saying, *Hæ te accusabunt cum majestas venerit judicantis*, &c.—O Elpidophorus! these shall be a witness against thee to all eternity, for thy just perdition, when the Judge cometh. What wilt thou do, wretch, when the people of God shall be admitted to the joys of heaven, and thyself thrust out? &c. If we have been baptized, and lived directly contrary to our baptismal vow, as if we were in covenant with the devil, the world, and the flesh, rather than with Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, what will become of us in the judgment?

But how shall we improve it?

First, We must personally and solemnly own the covenant made

with God in infancy. Every one of us should choose the Lord for our sovereign lord and portion; and Christ Jesus for our Redeemer and Saviour; and the Holy Ghost for our guide, sanctifier, and comforter. Every one must personally thus engage himself to God; it is not enough that Christ engage for us as the common surety of all the elect, Heb. vii. 22. Something he did for us, and in our names; but every one must take a bond upon himself before he can have the benefit of it. You must yield up yourselves to the Lord, 2 Chron. xxx. 8. It is not enough that the church engage for us as a visible political body, or a community and society of men, who are in visible covenant with God and Christ; Ezek. xvi. 8, 'Thou enteredst into covenant with me, and becamest mine;' meaning it of the body of the church; but every individual person must also enter into covenant with God, and become his: Ezek. xx. 37, 'I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.' Where there is an allusion to the sheep passing out of the fold when they were to be tithed for God, Lev. xxvii. 32; they were to be told with a rod, one, two, three, &c., and the tenth was the Lord's. God will not covenant with us in the lump and body, but every one was to be particularly minded of his duty; it is not enough that our parents did engage for us in baptism, as the Israelites, in the name of their little ones, did avouch God to be their God, Deut. xxix. 10-12. No man can savingly transact this work for another, we must ratify the covenant in our own persons, and make our own professed subjection to the gospel of Christ, 2 Cor. ix. 13. This work cannot be done by a proxy or assigns; our parents' dedication will not profit us without some personal act of our own, if we live to years of discretion. Once more, this must be done not only in words, or visible external rites, which may signify so much as personal covenanting with God, but a man must engage his heart to God, Jer. xxx. 21. Yea, this is a business that must be done between God and our own souls, where no outward witnesses are conscious to it. God speaketh to the soul in this transaction, Ps. xxxv. 3, 'Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation;' and the soul speaketh to God, Lam. iii. 24, 'Thou art my portion, saith my soul;' and Ps. xvi. 2, 'O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my God;' thus the covenant is carried on in soul-language. Now upon this personal inward covenanting with God our right to all the privileges doth depend.

Secondly, Renew often the sense of your obligation to God, and keep a constant reckoning how you lay out yourselves for him: Acts xxvii. 23, 'His I am and him I serve;' Phil. i. 21, 'To me to live is Christ.' Some few renegades renounce their baptism, but most Christians forget their baptism: 2 Peter i. 9, 'He is blind, and cannot see afar off, and has forgotten that he was washed from his old sins;' therefore we should be continually exciting ourselves both to obedience and dependence, that the sincerity of our first vow and consent may be verified by a real and constant performance of it.

Thirdly, You should use frequent self-reflection, that you may come to know whether you are indeed washed from the guilt and filth of sin: 1 Cor. vi. 11, 'Such were some of you, but now ye are sanctified, but now ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.' You should observe what further sense you have

of the pardon of sin, how you get ground upon your bondage of spirit, and grow up into some rejoicing of faith, for by these signs God intended our strong consolation, Heb. vi. 18; and the eunuch, when he was baptized, went his way rejoicing, Acts viii. 39. Hath God applied his covenant to me? taken me into the family? planted me into the mystical body of Christ? And shall not I be glad and rejoice in his salvation? So for sanctification, see whether God's interest doth prevail in you, or the interest of the flesh; what power and strength of will you get against corruption easily, Gal. v. 16, 17; whether sin be more subdued, and you can govern your passions and appetites better, Gal. v. 24. They that are Christ's should find something of this in themselves, otherwise their baptism is but an empty formality.

Fourthly and lastly, You must use it as a great help in all temptations; as when you are tempted to sin, either by the delights of sense: a Christian hath his answer ready, I am no debtor to the flesh; or, I am baptized, and dedicated to God in the way of mortification and holiness to obtain pardon and life, 1 Cor. vi. 15. Shall I take the members of Christ? &c. This soul, this body, this time, this strength is Christ's, not to please the flesh, but the Lord. Or by the terrors of sense. Dionysia comforted her son Majoricus, an African martyr, when he was going to suffer for owning the Godhead of Christ, with this speech: *Memento, fili, te baptizatum esse in nomine Patris, Filii, et Spiritus Sancti*—remember, my son, that thou art baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and be constant. So when you are tempted by the devil, taking advantage of your melancholy and grievous afflictions, to question God's love and mercy to penitent believers, remember the covenant sealed in baptism, that you may keep up your faith in God through Christ, which pardoneth all your sins, and hath begotten us to a lively hope. We must expect to be tempted; the devil tempted Christ, after his baptism, to question his filiation so solemnly attested. Compare Mat. iii. 17, with Mat. iv. 16. Luther saith of himself, that when the devil tempted him to despair, or to any doubts and fears about the love of God or his mercy to sinners, he would always answer, *Ecce ego baptizatus sum, et credo in Christum crucifixum*—Behold, I am baptized, and believe in Christ crucified. And he telleth us also of a holy virgin who gave this reply when the devil abused her solitudes, and injected any despairing thoughts into her mind, *Baptizata sum*—I am baptized, and entered into God's covenant, and will expect the pardon of my sins by Jesus Christ.

Thus should we all the days of our life improve our baptism, till we have the full of that holy and happy estate, for which we were first purified and washed in God's laver.
