

weight, Gal. vi. 5. There will be no relieving out of the flames, so there will be none that will be so kind as to bring a drop of water to cool the tongue in it, Ezek. xvi. 24. The whole weight shall lie upon thyself. Thou alone, and not another with thee, shalt bear it.

Wherefore consider what ye do. Be wise, sinners, and repent: For except ye repent, ye shall perish. The sound of the Lord's word goes away, and dies out as other sounds: but it liveth and abideth for ever in its efficacy, for the salvation or condemnation of those that hear it. So death and life are set before you, the blessing and the curse. *If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.*

HOW THE SACRAMENTS BECOME EFFECTUAL MEANS OF
SALVATION.

1 COR. xii. 13.—*For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.*

I COME now to handle the questions in the Catechism concerning the sacraments. And the first of these is that touching the efficacy of these holy ordinances, which is one of the doctrines of this text, in which the apostle explains and confirms the doctrine of the mystical union betwixt Christ and his people from the two sacraments.

I explained this text at large, when speaking of the mystical union from it*. I shall only consider it now, in so far as it relates to the sacraments. And so there is,

1. The number of the sacraments of the new Testament. These are two, viz. baptism, 'we are all baptized,' &c. and the Lord's Supper, called here *drinking*; the denomination being taken from the cup, as it is called *breaking of bread*, the name being taken from the bread therein used, Acts ii. 42. The former is the sacrament of our initiation into Christ, and union with him; the other, of our nourishment in, and communion with him.

2. The efficacy of these sacraments. They are effectual to salvation in those in whom they have their effect, they being united to Christ into one body, and partaking more and more of his Spirit, in those ordinances respectively which so secures their salvation from sin, and wrath too.

* See vol. i. page 544.

3. To whom they are effectual. Not to all, but to believers only, *We all*, viz. who are members of Christ, ver. 11.

4. How they become effectual. Their efficacy is not from themselves, nor from the administrator, but from the Spirit of Christ. *By one Spirit are we all baptized, &c.* So their efficacy depends on the operation of the Holy Ghost in and by them; and to this is presupposed the blessing of Christ, since the Holy Spirit does not work with means unblessed by Jesus Christ.

The purport of the text may be summed up in the following doctrine, viz.

DOCT. 'The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them; but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that by faith receive them.'

Here let us consider,

I. That the sacraments are means of salvation.

II. Wherein lies the efficacy of the sacraments, or when may it be said that the sacraments are effectual means of salvation.

III. To whom are they effectual? or in whom have they their efficacy?

IV. Whence is their efficacy?

V. Conclude with some inferences.

I. I shall shew, that the sacraments are means of salvation. For clearing of this, we shall enquire,

1. What is that salvation which the sacraments are said to be means of? It is the whole salvation purchased by Jesus Christ for the elect; which consists of two parts. (1.) Salvation from sin, Matth. i. 21. 'He shall save his people from their sins.' Sensible sinners look on sin as the mortal disease of the soul; and to be saved from it in the guilt and power thereof, they will account the great salvation, as indeed it is. (2.) Salvation from wrath, under which all must perish that partake not of Christ's salvation, 1 Thess. i. 10.—'Jesus which delivereth from the wrath to come.' This is the warding off the blow of justice, the stroke of death eternal, from the neck of a poor creature. Both these parts make it a great salvation, the greatest that a poor sinner is capable of, Heb. ii. 3. And this salvation is so absolutely necessary, that it is no wonder to see a sinner inquiring after the means of it.

2. What a mean of salvation is? A mean has a relation to an end, and is that which is used to bring about the end. And a mean of salvation is any thing appointed of God, in the use of which he carries on the salvation of his people. Thus all divine institutions in the church are means of salvation, that being the common end of

them all, Matth. xxviii. 20. Among these the most eminent are, the word, sacraments, and prayer. Prayer has a relation to both, and is to be mixed with them. The difference betwixt the two former is,

That the word is the mean of conversion, and the sacraments the means of confirmation: so the word is the leading, and the sacraments are the subsequent means of salvation. The word is first to have its effect, then the sacraments have theirs on the soul, 1 Cor. iii. 5. with Rom. iv. 11.

Now, that the sacraments are such means of salvation appears,

1. From the Lord's appointing them for that end to be used, Acts iii. 37, 38. 'Now, when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' 1 Cor. x. 16. 'The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? the bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?' And in that communion lies the safety of our souls for time and eternity.

2. From the saving effects which they have on the souls of God's people rightly using them. This is a sufficient testimony to their being such means, and proper means, Acts viii. 39. and ii. 42. &c.

II. *Quest.* Wherein lies the efficacy of the sacraments, or when may it be said, that the sacraments are effectual means of salvation?

The efficacy of a mean is its reaching the end for which it is appointed. If it fall short of that, it is ineffectual. The efficacy of a reproof lies in its reforming the party, and of meat in its nourishing the body. Now, the end of the sacraments being to represent, seal, and apply, Christ and his benefits to the soul, the efficacy of the sacraments lies in their reaching these ends; and then are they effectual, when they not only represent, but seal and apply, Christ and his benefits to the receiver, Rom. iv. 11. 1 Cor. xii. 13. 1 Pet. iii. 21. In a word, it lies in effectual oblation and application of Christ and his benefits. And when they reach not these ends, they are not effectual.

Now, sometimes these effects of the sacraments are so lively and evident, that the soul perceives them, as the eunuch did, Acts viii. 38. when he went on his way rejoicing. Sometimes they are not discerned by the believer, though really they are wrought in him, as it was with the two disciples going to Emmaus, in another case, Luke xxiv. The following are signs of this efficacy.

Sign 1. The soul's cleaving more closely to the hope of the co-

venant than before, going out of itself more to Jesus Christ and his righteousness. This being the consequent of the sacraments, is an evidence of the obsignation, Phil. iii. 3.

Sign 2. More solid tenderness with respect to sin and duty, and longing to be rid of the body of sin and death. This is a sign of the application, Rom. vi. 4. and viii. 23. For nearness to Christ is the cause of distance from sin.

III. *Quest.* To whom are the sacraments effectual? or in whom they have their efficacy?

1. Not to all who partake of them. Simon was baptized, but continued in the gall of bitterness and the bond iniquity, Acts viii. 13, 23. Men may partake of the Lord's supper unworthily. The apostle tells us how highly some were advanced in respect of sacramental privileges, with whom God was not well pleased, 1 Cor. x. 1,—5. And sad experience bears witness to this truth.

2. It is effectual to believing receivers, as to the Ethiopian eunuch, Acts viii. 37, 39. Mark xvi. 16. 'He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved.' It is with the sacraments as with the word, Heb. iv. 2. 'The word did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.' But this is not to exclude infants from the efficacy of baptism, since they are not capable of actual believing; but they having the spirit of faith abiding in them, baptism has its effect on them.

IV. *Quest.* Whence is the efficacy of the sacraments?

Negatively, 1. It is not from any virtue in themselves that these blessed effects are produced. God has put a power of nourishment in our meat, and of warming in our clothes; but no power of working grace either in the water of baptism, or bread and wine in the Lord's supper. So the work wrought will never confer grace. The scriptures deny this power to the sacraments themselves, 1 Pet. ii. 21. 'Baptism doth now save us, (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God), by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.' And many thousands are partakers of the sacraments, who yet never partake of the grace of God, as Simon. These pools will never prove healing, if there be not a moving of the waters from a superior cause.

2. It is not from the piety nor intention of the administrator neither. The holiness and best qualifications that ever were in a minister cannot make them effectual; let them burn and shine with light and life in the administration, they cannot make them effectual to one soul, 1 Cor. iii. 6, 7. 'I have planted (says Paul,) Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth

the increase.' The efficacy of God's ordinances depends not on men, the administrators, either as to the making or marring their efficacy, Phil. i. 16, 17, 18. 'The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and therein do I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.' They may be employed in saving others, who are castaways themselves.

Positively, 1. The efficacy of the sacraments depends on the blessing of Christ, as the cause without which they could have no efficacy, for as much as the Spirit of Christ will not work by means unblessed, Matth. xv. 9. 'In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.' But Christ has blessed these ordinances, first, and then the Spirit works in them and by them. Now, this blessing of Christ is contained in the institution of the sacraments; which comprehends two things, here called Christ's blessing.

(1.) A command authorising the use of these ordinances. (2.) A promise of benefit by them to the worthy receivers, Matth. xxviii. 19, 20. and xxvi. 26, &c.

2. It depends on the working of the Spirit in them and by them on the souls of the receivers, as the efficient cause, 1 Cor. xii. 13. The Spirit comes along with them, and renders them effectual to his own.

I shall shut up all with a few inferences.

Inf. 1. Hence learn to prize the sacraments, and behold the dreadful nature of the sin of slighting them. They are means of salvation, and therefore ought to be dear to all who would partake of salvation. Those who slight the means, undervalue the end, the great salvation. Did many amongst us consider this, they durst not so easily live without the word or sacraments, as they do, Luke vii. 30.

2. Rest not on the sacraments. They are but means, which are not effectual to every one that receives them. Many receive them both who never receive Christ; but for all that they wear Christ's badge, they work the devil's work. And it is not your receiving them, but receiving benefit by them, that will be a good plea in the end, Luke xiii. 26, 27.

3. Look more to Christ's institution, and promise accompanying it, with respect to the sacraments, and less to men who have a commission to administer them, if ye would not mar your benefit by the ordinances. It is lamentable to think, that where the minister's

commission cannot be quarrelled, and Christ's institution is observed, many nevertheless are so weak, as to be frightened from God's ordinance with scruples about the administrators, as if the Spirit of God could not be expected to work with Christ's institutions, unless they be in the hands of such and such ministers. This absurd and sinful practice prevails too much at this day, as if the efficacy of the sacraments depended on the administrators.

4. *Lastly*, Be concerned for the working of the Spirit in all ordinances, and particularly in the sacraments; for without that they can have no effect. When ye bring your children to baptism, and when ye come to the Lord's table, be concerned, and earnestly wrestle and pray for it. Let it be at these seasons the matter of your exercise, that the Lord may accompany these solemn ordinances with divine life and power unto you, and may excite your graces unto a vigorous and lively exercise, without which they will be utterly ineffectual to you.

THE NATURE OF THE SACRAMENTS.

ROM. iv. 11.—*And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith, which he had yet being uncircumcised.*

THIS text discovers the nature of a sacrament, in the description the apostle gives us of circumcision, which Abraham received. In which consider,

1. The sacrament itself which the apostle treats of, circumcision, which was the initiating seal of the covenant under the Old Testament, and has been succeeded by baptism under the New.

2. The author of it. Abraham invented it not, but received it from the Lord, whose institution it was, Gen. xvii. 10; 'This is my covenant which ye shall keep between me and you, and thy seed after thee; every man child among you shall be circumcised;'^{*} even as the apostle says, 1 Cor. xi. 23; 'I have received of the Lord, that, which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread, &c.

^{*} On this passage the author in his Critical Essay on Genesis, from which some extracts have been given above, pp. 379, 404, thus comments: "This [is the design of] my covenant, which ye shall observe; between me, and you, and thy seed after thee:" That is, this is the sign between me and you, and thy seed, even the sign of the covenant. Between you; q. d. Between you, between you, i. e. you and every one of you, Abraham and his whole family, male and female, without exception, then