

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.

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#### 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;'<sup>\*</sup> 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.

<sup>\*</sup> 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

3. The parts of it; an external sign, the cutting off of the fore-skin; an invisible grace, the righteousness of faith.

4. The uses and ends of it: it was appointed to be a sign and a seal too, no nakedly signifying, but exhibiting and applying spiritual blessings.

*Lastly*, The subject of it: a believer, one to whom the righteousness of faith belonged. Such a person was Abraham, and such are all who truly believe in Christ.

The doctrine of this text is,

DOCT. 'A sacrament is an holy ordinance, instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs, Christ, and the benefits of the new covenant, are represented, sealed, and applied to believers.'

Here we are to consider,

I. The word *sacrament*.

II. The author of the sacrament.

III. The parts of a sacrament.

IV. Shew what is the sacramental union of these parts, or wherein it lies.

V. Who are the subjects of the sacraments, for whom they are appointed of God.

VI. What are the general uses and ends of the sacraments.

VII. Deduce some inferences.

I. Let us consider the word *sacrament*. Of which two things are to be noted. (1.) That it properly signifies a military oath, an oath taken by soldiers, whereby they bound themselves solemnly to their prince or general, to obey orders, and not to desert their colours. And some say this oath was mutual. (2.) That it is not a scripture word; not being used in any of the two languages in which the scripture was written, but a Latin word originally. But the church

in being; opposed to his seed after him. Thus all his are taken with him into the covenant, so far as to have a right to the seal of it.—That every male be circumcised for you. The construction and sense of these words is, To be circumcised is the covenant (i. e. the sign thereof) which ye shall observe. Thus the great duty of the covenant is made to be, believing and depending on the promise of the covenant; wholly trusting on, and cleaving to, the righteousness of faith, whereof circumcision was the seal, Rom. iv. 11; the which is productive of all other duties. Further, these words bear this meaning, viz. That every male of you be circumcised for you: that is, in the name of the whole family, consisting of women as well as of men: that so you may be altogether one people in the bond of the covenant; compare Gen. xxxiv. 15, 22. And thus there appears a twofold reason, why our Lord Jesus Christ was circumcised: (1.) That it might be to him a seal of the promises mentioned, Gen. xvii. 4,—8; (2.) Because he was the head, and so the most noble part, of that one people embodied with him, in the covenant of grace, for whom he received the promises.

has made use of it to signify those ordinances which are the signs and seals of the covenant of grace; and that warrantably, because the things thereby signified are found in scripture, though not the word itself. For by the sacraments we are obliged to the spiritual warfare under the conduct of Jesus Christ, the Captain of our salvation, to whom we engage ourselves by them, and he also engages himself to us for our salvation.

II. The author of the sacraments is the Lord Jesus Christ, as King and head of his church. Man neither made, nor can make a sacrament, but the Lord only. For, (1.) He only is the author of the word of promise, and of the covenant: who then but he can make the seals thereof? (2.) The sacraments are a part of religious worship, which belongs only to God to appoint, Matth. xv. 8; the Lord Jesus is the Author them, by his instituting of them. They are instituted by himself, Matth. xxviii. 19, 20; 'Go ye and teach all nations (says he to his disciples), baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you,' 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. It is the word of institution that makes the sacrament, which consists of a command to use the rite, and a promise of grace annexed to the right use of it.

III. Let us consider the parts of a sacrament. These are two.

1. An outward and sensible sign used according to Christ's own appointment, which is something that we can see with our eyes, or perceive by our bodily senses. These are of two sorts. (1.) Signifying things. Such are the water in baptism, and the bread and wine in the Lord's supper. (2.) Signifying actions; for the sacramental actions, being significant, as well as the things, are signs, and sensible signs, which we may see with our eyes. Such are the sprinkling of the water in baptism, and the breaking, giving, and receiving, of the bread and wine in the Lord's supper.

I say, used according to Christ's appointment; and therefore these same things and actions are not sacramental when otherwise used, as when water is sprinkled, or bread broken, without those other circumstances appointed by Jesus Christ in these ordinances. For where there is no divine institution, there is no sacrament.

2. An inward and spiritual grace thereby signified, Matth. iii. 11; 'I indeed baptise you with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire,' 1 Pet. iii. 21; 'The like figure whereunto, even baptism, doth also

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,' Rom. ii. 28, 29; 'For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God.' The signs are earthly, to be perceived with the bodily eyes; the thing signified heavenly, to be perceived only by faith. The former tends to the body, the latter to the soul. The one is received corporeally, the other spiritually.

The thing signified by the sacramental signs is Jesus Christ himself with all his saving benefits, Rom. vi. 3; 1 Cor. xi. 24; 'This is my body,' &c. Not Christ's benefits without himself; for as there is no washing with water, without application of the water itself, and no nourishment by bread and wine, without eating and drinking of it; so there is no partaking of Christ's benefits without partaking of himself, Heb. iii. 14. Rom. viii. 32. So unbelievers can have no saving benefit by the sacraments; for Christ himself is the kernal of the sacraments; and wherever he comes, he brings all saving benefits along with him, Rom. viii. 32. even the purchase of his death.

The sum of these saving benefits ye have in that word, 1 Cor. i. 30. 'Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption; which comprehends all that is necessary for the cure of the case of any poor sinner.

IV. I proceed to shew, what is the sacramental union of these parts, or wherein it doth lie. There is an union of the parts of the sacraments, and without it they could not be accounted parts of the sacraments. It is by virtue of the union betwixt the signs and the thing signified, that the one gets the name of the other, Gen. xvii. 10. 1 Cor. xi. 24, 25. 'This is my body, This cup is the new testament in my blood:' yea, and the effects of the one are ascribed to the other, Tit. iii. 5. 'Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.' Now, this is not a natural or local union; for in respect of place they are as far distant as heaven and earth: but it is a relative union, consisting in that spiritual relation that is between the sign and the thing signified, made by virtue of Christ's institution, whereby the signs signify or represent, seal, and exhibit to the worthy receivers the thing signified.

V. I come to shew, who are the subjects of the sacraments for

whom they are appointed of God. They are those, and those only, who are within the covenant, Rom. xv. 8. 'Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers.' Exod. xii. 48. 'When a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and keep the passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof.' For the seals of the covenant can belong to none but those who are in it. So they have a right to them before God who are savingly within the covenant, and those a right before the church who are in it by a credible profession. Believers and their seed have a right to baptism; but only Christians come to years have a right to the Lord's supper, 1 Cor. xi. 28. But let a man examine himself,' &c.

VI. *Lastly*, I come to shew, what are the general uses and ends of the sacraments. The principal uses and ends are threefold.

1. To be holy signs to signify and represent Christ and his benefits to the believer, to be discerned by faith, Rom. iv. 11. There is a fitness in them for this end, there being a plain resemblance betwixt the signs and the thing signified; whereby the signs do bring into their minds, and do clearly represent to a spiritual discerner the thing signified. And thus they strengthen faith, and all other graces in a believer; as seeing helps believing.

2. To be heaven's public seals to seal the covenant, Rom. iv. 11. It is by them that God solemnly ratifies and confirms the covenant with believers. The covenant is held out in the word to be embraced by all to whom it comes: by believing we enter into the covenant; by the sacraments God declares it to be a bargain, as one does by subscribing a contract, and sealing it. And thus also they strengthen faith and all other graces; and oblige the believer to obedience, as one in covenant with God, Rom. vi. 3.

3. To be means of applying and exhibiting Christ and his benefits to the believer, 1 Cor. xi. 24. So that with the sacramental signs, in the right use of them, is joined the possession and actual enjoyment of the thing signified: 'This is my body, take eat.' As one is put in possession of houses or land, by earth or stone given them, according to law, upon a disposition: so is the believer made partaker of Christ, and solemnly put in possession of all his saving benefits, by these means. The less principal end of the sacraments is to be badges of our Christian profession, to distinguish men from those that are without the church, Eph. ii. 11, 12. 'Wherefore remember that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision, by that which is called the circumcision in

the flesh made by hands ; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the common-wealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.'

I shall conclude this discourse with some inferences.

*Inf.* 1. Great is the privilege of the covenant, and the benefits thereof, which God has thus appointed to be sealed. Seals are not used in small matters, but in those of great importance ; how great then must those be which heaven seals ?

2. Our gracious God has shewn great kindness to, and concern for the welfare and comfort of poor sinners coming to him through his Son. Though his word be firmer than heaven and earth, he remembers our frame, that we are guilty, and therefore fearful and suspicious creatures ; and, for our ease, that we may the better trust him, has appointed seals of his benefits promised in his covenant.

3. Great is the sin of slighting the sacraments, and neglecting to partake of them. God appended seals to the covenant of works, viz. the tree of life, and that of the knowledge of good and evil. He also appointed seals to the covenant of grace, under the old dispensation, and under the new too. So divine wisdom has seen them always necessary. What an affront to the wisdom and kindness of God, and his covenant, must the slighting of them then be ?

4. *Lastly*, Great is the sin of abusing and profaning the sacraments, 1 Cor. xi. 27, 'Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.' The unconverted profane the seals of heaven by setting them to a blank, where there is no covenant. The saints in a dead and sleepy frame do also profane them, while they are in no capacity to discern what they are appointed to represent, seal, and apply. O then use the sacraments in faith, according to Christ's institution, and seek his blessing upon them, that the benefits thereby sealed may become effectually yours.