

them, the will of God has been the invariable rule of religious duty ; but his perceptive will, under each of those dispensations, in some articles of importance, has been disputed ; and they who have erred in these disputes, have commonly connected error with error, till their obedience became partial, superficial, or miserably misplaced.

We may further observe, that when particular commands have been settled without dispute, the *manner* in which they should be regarded, has been strangely overlooked. Yet, in the regular discharge of duty, the manner in which we become obedient, is of no trifling moment. The connection between faith and obedience, between one duty and another, the order which makes our actions excellent, the call that will justify extraordinary steps, and the dependance we should place in God to execute any thing which he approves, calls aloud for our best attention. He who is in the habit of thinking soundly on these things, will never be much elated at his own behaviour ; nor is he  
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likely to be thoroughly satisfied with his past, or present conduct.

Baptism was not always a duty ; nor is it now the immediate duty of every man to be baptized. It has, as well as other duties, its own place. It had no existence as a duty, before the preaching of John ; and it is evident, he was not permitted to administer that ordinance according to his own discretion. On the contrary, John was bound to regard his heavenly mission ; and his fidelity in the discharge of his uncommon office, is an example that men of the strictest integrity very much admire.

But though Baptism was not always a duty, though it is not now the duty of infants, or of unbelievers, to be baptized, yet to infer from this, it is only a ceremony which we may either regard, or omit, or that this Christian ordinance is injurious to holy dispositions, or that they who are spiritual need not be baptized in water ; these are inferences as illogical, as they must be offensive to him who  
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hath expressly required them that believe, to be baptized in his name.

Still, who are the only proper subjects of this ordinance, is, to the present hour, disputed: and, among other hurtful misimprovements of this debate, one is, that a certain class of people who profess to be good Christians, have long since denied that it is the duty of any person to be baptized. Their error has been again and again refuted; and the source of their mistake repeatedly exposed. But what avails it! They who will not see, elude instruction. Fond of their own light within, argument is either neglected, or derided; and written rules, though they should be found in the New Testament, are not suffered to correct their *superior* understanding.

My sentiments, and my practice, relative to Baptism, are well known to you; and if they were not, ye do not now expect me to make a formal confession of my faith. The text leads me to speak of the Baptism of  
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Christ; and on it, I would observe, first, in what manner he submitted to this ordinance; and, secondly, what ends were to be answered by his submission.

I. I am to say, in what *manner* Jesus Christ submitted to be baptized by John. Here, I shall venture to lay before you the following assertions; not as infallible, but as containing my stedfast belief on this part of the present subject.

1. I may safely assert, that our Lord was baptized by his own *choice*. For he came from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. Now, as our Lord never chose to do any thing which it did not become him to prefer, for this fatiguing journey of two days extent, taken of his own accord, and performed on foot, he must have had sufficient reasons: and these, whatever they were, as he could not but clearly discern them, so, it is evident, he was not disposed to set them aside.

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2. It seems to be equally obvious, that when our Lord was baptized, he submitted to that sacred appointment with a fixed *resolution* to regard the will of his heavenly Father. Such a resolution was unavoidable. His condescension, in this instance, might be misinterpreted. People might infer he was inferior to John. He knew also, that they who questioned John's authority to baptize, would disapprove of the sanction of his example. He likewise foresaw, that John himself would seriously object to this instance of his obedience; so that, unless we suppose, that the **Messiah** well knew it became him to be baptized, we cannot conceive he would have resolved on such submission; and yet we see, without the most deliberate, and determinate resolution, it was not possible for him to have been baptized of John.

3. I will add, that it is sufficiently clear to me, that our Lord was baptized by *immersion*. This perhaps may be attributed to my supposed prejudices in favour of that ancient practice. This, however, is a mistake. For,  
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if upon any sound principle it could be proved that sprinkling might be a substitute for immersion, I freely own, I had much rather sprinkle than baptize. But believing it cannot, as I was baptized myself, without consulting flesh and blood in reference to that duty, so, since I have preached the gospel, I have baptized others, and yet continue to baptize, without consulting with my natural sensations, or listening to the suggestions of worldly advantage, or of popular applause.

If the meaning of those original *words*, which most of all relate to the mode of Baptism, be sought for, we must allow the Greek nation to possess a clear understanding of those terms. If they do not, we may well despair of finding out in this country, what they have been unable to discern. But how those words are taken by them, their practice of immersion, as a religious rite, for more than seventeen hundred years, strongly evinces. Compared with the loud voice of national decision, on such a subject, and with such obedience, what is the weight of opposite opinions? Na-

tions may err ; but the grounds of their error are not easy to be concealed. When therefore, no reason can be given why a nation should err in its judgment of a few common terms in its own language, surely, they must presume much too much, who imagine that their criticisms should control the decisions of such a nation.

The *place* where our Lord was baptized, affords additional ground to conclude he was baptized by immersion. No man means to be ridiculous in the discharge of his duty, or by doing that which he believes is right. But would it not seem ridiculous if two men were to go into the Jordan, the Thames, the Trent, or the Severn, the one to sprinkle, and the other to be sprinkled with water ?

It cannot be said, that brooks and rivers were antiently chosen to avoid persecution ; since that end was more likely to be answered by sprinkling in a private room, than by baptizing in a public situation. But when  
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it is urged, that brooks and rivers, were resorted to, when John, and the Apostles baptized, not with any intention to immerse the candidates in water, but that their cattle, or themselves, might be properly supplied with sufficient quantities of water for other uses; or that they went thither chiefly to give immense crowds an opportunity to approach and see a new sight, it is difficult to believe, that such persons are thoroughly sincere.

The *actions* which are recorded in baptizing the primitive believers, are such as cannot be accounted for, unless we admit they were immersed in water. Of our Lord, it is said, that he came to *Jordan* to be baptized of John; and that when he was baptized, which must have been *in* the river Jordan, he went up straightway *out* of the water. Now, if he came to Jordan, went into that river, and was there baptized, of these *actions* we can give no *adequate* or serious account, if we deny that he was immersed, when he himself submitted to that positive institution.



Neither common sense, nor religion, required a more minute account of those actions which were essential to the baptism of believers, than is recorded in the New Testament. Had we that alone, which is open to inspection in the eighth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, it would be abundantly sufficient; provided the reader was not resolved before-hand, to give it no credit: and to such a disposition, the most copious detail must have been in vain.

A justly celebrated commentator, in this country, of the pædobaptist persuasion, overcome with the force of facts, confesses, that the Eunuch was immersed; but one of his literary friends, in a letter lately published, among others better worth our notice, reproves him for his honest concession; and says, I do not see any proof, that the Eunuch was baptized by *immersion*. He adds, Nor do I see reason to think, that John the Baptist, used immersion, but rather otherwise. This gentleman had, it seems, the art of seeing what he pleased upon this subject; and  
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when a man is once an adept in that art, arguments are esteemed as straw, and historical narration, as rotten wood.

The *concessions*, however, which learned, and pious, pædobaptists have made in favor of immersion, shew, they were of opinion, that sprinkling could not be supported by any narrative of baptism which is recorded in the New Testament. Their numerous, and unexpected concessions, to a very large amount, have lately been collected, arranged, and improved, with great assiduity, by one of our denomination. But the force of such witnesses, in reference to baptism, lies, in my opinion, in the futility of those arguments which, from their own concessions, they are compelled to urge in defence of their well-known deviation from the practice of John, and of the Apostles of Jesus Christ. Their arguments, so far as I am able to understand them, terminate in one point. For they all of them end in this question: Hath the Church, or some person, or some persons in it, a *discretionary* power to alter a positive institution

stitution of Jesus Christ ; provided *they* should be of opinion, that the alteration would be more *useful* than the original practice, or more *agreeable* to the nature, and genius of Christianity ?

On this commodious principle, they have endeavoured to prove, it is more decent, rational, safe, and expedient, to sprinkle, than to immerse. With what success, need not be told : and what strange things have been introduced, and applauded, in religious societies, on the fascinating plea of discretionary power, it is not necessary now to mention.

We have seen, that when Christ was baptized, it was by his own choice, with a fixed resolution to submit to that ordinance, and also, that he was baptized by immersion.

4. I shall only add, that when our Lord was baptized of John, his obedience was entirely under the dominion of a *religious* principle. In the former œconomy, *circumcision* was closely connected with *civil* subjection, and

and terrestrial donations. But Baptism is, by no means, essential to any obedience which is due to kings, or which is peculiar to any mode of civil government. If it is not taught as a religious duty, it is profaned; and if it is not submitted to as a matter of conscience, by him that is baptized, the sacred appointment is either mistaken, or perverted.

John was not the author of this institution. He was sent of God to baptize; and it was a branch of evangelical righteousness in him, to comply with his heavenly mission. The character of Christ, was vastly superior to John's; yet, he was not to baptize, but to be baptized: and knowing this to be the will of his Father, he obeyed; and complied with that, as well as with every other act of righteousness, which it became him to fulfil.

From the religious disposition, and behaviour of our Lord, in this instance of his obedience, we may infer, that if any tincture of religion, which is founded on a belief that God is God, and that he is a re-

warder of them that diligently seek him ; if any tincture of this, is essential to baptism, he who is properly baptized, cannot be an infant, or an unbeliever. On the other hand, if they may be baptized who are utterly unacquainted with the nature of religion, there is sufficient reason to conclude, that this indulgence rests on the discretionary power of men, and not on the word of God.

The religious deportment of our Lord, connected with his condescension, when he was baptized of John, deserve our notice. He came from Galilee to Jordan uninvited. He came, not only without ostentation, but without giving notice of his approach. No peculiar indulgence softened his external submission to that ordinance which is not very pleasing to flesh and blood. He was baptized as other people. His conduct in the whole of this business, was charming : but of that kind which only charms them who have just notions of obedience to God, and who desire above all things, to be devoted to his will.

II. Let

II. Let us now consider, what *ends* were to be answered by the Baptism of Christ.

1. One end to be answered by this transaction was, to demonstrate that the Baptism of John was from heaven, and not of men. We cannot doubt whether Christ perfectly understood the nature of John's mission; nor can we believe that it would have met with his approbation, unless it had been divine. To set this in the clearest, and strongest light, was an article of great importance. Much depended on the fact; not only then, but now; for, as that point is settled, so will the character of Christ rise or fall, in human apprehension. Our Lord therefore, by being baptized of John, gave such a proof of John's authority to baptize, as to make it evident, that they who called it in question, and refused to submit to his baptism, rejected the counsel of God against themselves.

2. Another end to be answered by the Baptism of Christ, was to make it manifest  
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that he himself was the very Messiah.—Baptism was a *new* religious rite. This, of course, would produce much speculation, and repeated interrogations. It had this effect. The Jews sent Priests and Levites, from Jerusalem, to say unto John, Who art thou? John, conceiving they would take it for granted, that because he baptized, he pretended to be the promised Messiah, confessed, and denied not, but confessed, he was not the Christ. They asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? Art thou that prophet? He answered, No. They further ask, Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, nor that prophet? John answered them, saying, I baptize in water: but there standeth one among you, whom you know not. He it is, who coming after me, is preferred before me, whose shoes latchet I am unworthy to unloose. These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Now, from these things, it appears, that Baptism was so far from being founded on  
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Jewish customs, that the Jews themselves were of opinion, that, if John was not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that Prophet, which they, from their own prophecies, expected, he had no right to baptize: and John, as we have seen, was very far from treating their questions as frivolous. He answered them with great sobriety. I am, said he, the voice of one crying in the wilderness, as said the prophet Isaiah. Which was as much as to say, Though I am not the Messiah, I am his precursor, and am sent to point him out to the house of Israel: and the next day, seeing Jesus coming to him, he cried out, Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world; and added, This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me, for he was before me, and I knew him not; but that HE should be made *manifest* to Israel, THEREFORE am I come baptizing in water.

This testimony of John was the more to be regarded as he had no personal acquaintance with Christ previous to this time. For  
John



John was in the desart, till the day of his shewing himself to Israel: probably in the desart of Ziph, or Maon, near to Hebron. But Christ, before his baptism, resided chiefly at Nazareth; so that, when they met at Jordan, John twice says, I knew him not: and adds, but he that sent me to baptize in water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the spirit descending and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, says John, and bare record, that this is the Son of God.

3. Another end to be answered by the Baptism of Christ, was to teach those that did, and them that should believe in him, that his kingdom was spiritual, and was, by no means, to be confined to Judea. The example of our Lord was intended to operate on *individuals*; and when it has its due effect, it is not material where his followers were born, from whom they were descended, or may choose to live. The children of the flesh are not accounted for the seed. In  
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his kingdom, they who were afar off, are made nigh by his blood : so that, both Jews and Gentiles, in him, have access, by one spirit, unto the Father. In short, as many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female ; for they are all one in Christ Jesus : and if they be Christ's, then, and not otherwise, are they Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

The true nature of the kingdom of Christ was so contrary to the conceptions, and desires of Jews, and Gentiles, that it was needful, in various modes, to be very explicit on this important point. Accordingly, we find, that many parables were spoken, and that many sermons were preached, to convince them his kingdom was not of this world : ancient prophecies also were explained, and such arguments were urged, as had the strongest tendency to produce conviction.

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Among the rest, the manner in which the ordinance of Baptism was *first* administered, contributed very much to give the attentive, right notions of the kingdom of Christ. They saw, even from the Baptism of John, that the unrighteous, and impenitent, could not be acknowledged as proper subjects of that ordinance; and that it was in vain for them to say, We have Abraham to our father. They were plainly told, that the axe was laid to the root of the trees, and that every tree which brought not forth good fruit, would be hewn down, and cast into the fire. The obedience of our Lord confirmed the doctrine of John; and from both, it appeared, that Baptism was a personal concern, on religious principles, and to obtain the answer of a good conscience towards God.

If such was the tendency of this ordinance when it was *rightly* administered, we, who believe this, cannot but lament, that it should have been changed for the worse, in the manner that history attests, and which the common practice of thousands confirm. This

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is the more affecting, as they who have innovated most, like other innovators, attempt to *justify* their own conduct, and hold up others as obstinate, who refuse to submit to their popular decisions.

4. Another end to be answered by the Baptism of Christ was, that he might enter with due solemnity on his public course of action. Never was so much to be done in a little time since the creation, as our Lord had to do in the short interval of his public ministry. The number, the nature, and importance of his mighty, and merciful works, required that he should enter on his public labours with a solemnity that might excite the most sober, and pleasing expectations. What could be more likely to produce this effect, than those circumstances which were closely connected with his being baptized by John? All men held John to be a prophet. Yet, great as John was in their apprehension, and in the sight of the Lord, he confessed he was unspeakably inferior to  
Jesus