

H. Parker & Co.
Seasonable Plea for

LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE,

Against some late

Oppressive Proceedings ;

Particularly in the

Town of BERWICK,

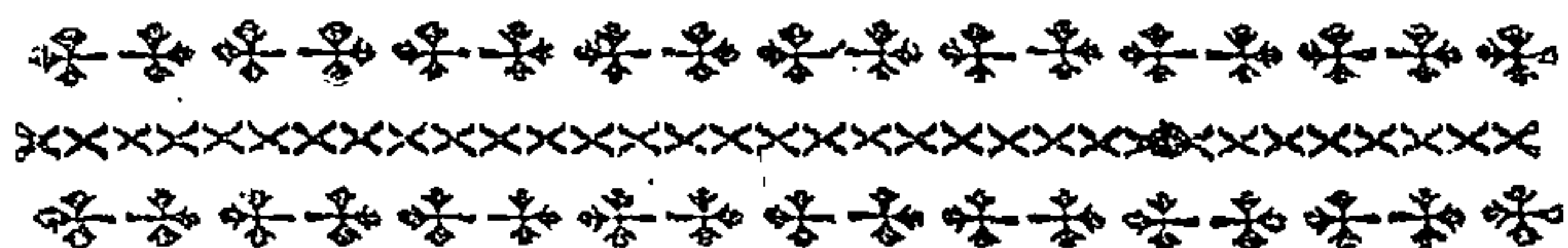
IN THE

County of YORK.

“ Good Conscience men allow, they say,
“ But must be understood,
“ To say as they themselves do say,
“ Or else it can't be good.

GODDARD.

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P R E F A C E.

THE ensuing address to a minister and his church in Berwick, was not wrote with any design of publication ; and when that was first requested, I intirely declined it for several reasons ; one of which was, that I would be far from exposing private concerns to public view, farther than is necessary. But upon a renewed request from my friends in Berwick, and viewing how greatly those called the Baptist principles are mistaken and misrepresented by ministers and churches in that part of the country, where they are but little known, I thought proper to yield to the request : Neither in reality are these private concerns, for they were publicly acted among them, and there is reason to think that both authors and neighbouring ministers were consulted in the affair. Though what had the greatest weight in my mind was, the consideration that many who are filling the nation with the cry of LIBERTY, and against *oppressors*, are at the same time themselves violating that dearest of all rights, LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE ; for if that man is *inexcusable* who judgeth another, and yet doth the *same things*, and if we are “ sure that the judgment of God is “ according to truth, against them which commit “ such things,” is it not a needful kindness, instead of an injury, to endeavour to shew to such, be
they.

they ever so much our superiors, wherein they are exposing themselves to that judgment ? And as I am sensible that multitudes have the same notions concerning liberty of conscience, as this minister and church have, I shall transcribe their sentiments upon it, and make a few remarks thereon.

They express themselves thus : “ As to what
 “ you say of *tying the conscience in spiritual things*,
 “ we can hardly think what you refer to. It is
 “ what we intirely disallow and protest against, and
 “ are not sensible of doing it ; but if you can con-
 “ vince us of having done it, we are ready to re-
 “ move that objection.—Liberty of conscience we
 “ claim ourselves and allow others, as a darling
 “ point ; and therefore must not be *forced* to any
 “ thing contrary to *our* consciences, nor be thought
 “ to tie the consciences of others by *not consenting*
 “ to what we cannot think to be for the honor of
 “ God, and interest of religion.” It is readily
 granted, that the use either of force or fraud is con-
 trary to true liberty ; but does it not look odd for
 a minister and his church to talk of being *forced*,
 only by a request from one of their members, de-
 livered in as mild and respectful terms as language
 can furnish ? However, by this we may guess what
 complaints we should hear, if they had as much
 occasion from us as we have from them. The
 plain fact is this. A brother of that church with-
 drew from their communion, and (as an attested
 copy of their records shews) gave two reasons for
 his so doing : One was, their admitting persons of
 various *characters* to own the covenant, and bring
 their children to baptism : The other was, “ That
 “ he saw a spirit of opposition against the spirit of
 “ God in the church.” And they don’t deny the
 truth

truth of his reasons, but judged them not to be “sufficient,” and therefore declare him to “lie under the public offence of this church,” &c. And they afterward tell his wife that this censure “was not for one opinion more than another, but for the neglect of——attending upon the Lord’s supper.” And when he and his wife were both convinced by a farther searching of the scriptures, not only that the half-way covenant was wrong, but also that believers only were the proper subjects of baptism, she wrote a letter, wherein she in a very respectful manner requested a dismission to the Baptist church in that town: In answer to which they wrote a letter to her as long as a sermon, in which they positively *deny* her request.

And what now is their liberty of conscience come to? Why truly their *members* are *forced* either to believe as the church believes, or be dealt with as public offenders! They tell this sister, that “nothing but very weighty and grievous things lying upon the conscience, which they cannot remedy, can justify a person to separate,” &c. Which implies, that in such a case they may separate; yet whose conscience is to judge when the case is so? If it is only the church that is to judge, then where is their allowance of liberty to others as a darling point! It will doubtless be said, that they give reasons for their denial of that request. Well what are they? One of them is, they say that Baptist church was “set up in an irregular manner.” And was there ever a church which allowed that those who separated from their irregularities, were regular in so doing? But to let others judge of this case, I understand it to be plainly thus. Sundry of these brethren in Berwick, withdrew from this
and

and other churches for like reasons, and were dealt with in like manner as these mentioned above ; and they were baptized by the pastor of the Baptist church in Haverhill, and he with two deacons from that church were present when this church was constituted on June 28. 1768. who have maintained divine worship among themselves ever since, and are owned as a regular church of Christ by sister churches of the same faith and order. Regular, is a word which is turned to any purpose which men please, and it is well known that it is often applied to those who were lately guilty of the most bloody disorders and irregularities ever seen in our Metropolis. And it expressly appears by what is before refer'd to, that all that this minister and church in Berwick have against these two members, arises from their refusing to join with them ; and by what I can learn, the case is much the same with the rest of the Baptist church, whom they call irregular.

I know there are snares on every hand, which we should watch against, therefore let none mistake me, and think that I am against ministers and churches labouring faithfully with their members, if they think them out of the way in any respect ; but the manner of their doing of it in the case before us, appears contrary to the gospel rule of *speaking the truth in love*, in the following particulars.

1. They try to strain a few of this sister's expressions, to make her say what she did not say, in order to get an advantage against her. Indeed they say they regard not so much her inconsistency in writing, as in her sentiments and practice ; but her sentiments and practice are plainly these, that there are some in that church which she esteems as
beloved

beloved in Christ, and wishes well to them all, while the church as a body appears to her so corrupt both in doctrine and practice, that she cannot with a clear conscience join with them : And where is any inconsistency in that ?

2. When they set out to shew the Baptists errors, they bring in many truths which we hold as much as they do, and hereby unwary minds are caught with a prejudice against us as a very bad people, that don't hold such good truths. So have I seen a net baited with as good wheat as that which is laid up in the garner. Some of the truths I refer to are these ; that whatever agrees not with the law and testimony, is to be rejected ; that fathers, or our nearest relations, are not to be followed, but rather testified against when they forsake the truth and their duty ; that baptism is a sign of initiation or introduction into the visible church of Christ, and as such ought not to be repeated. These and other truths which they bring in, we hold as fully as they, and for them to represent the contrary, is unfair dealing with us, and tends to deceive others.

3. Having attempted to strip us of such good cloathing, they would cloath us with such bearskins as these, viz. That in order for a person to join with us, he must renounce " all that he has done " to lay himself under obligations, all his professions, " and all that God has done for him heretofore ; " and a great deal of such stuff, which is as contrary to truth as darkness is to light. For they say, " That must be of men, which is not taken from " the word of God, as enjoined there ; " therefore when we are convinced that infant-sprinkling is such, we renounce it, and practice believers baptism, which is plainly enjoined there, without the least thought

thought of renouncing any thing which God has done for us, or that we have heretofore done towards him, that was agreeable to his will.

4. Having thus laboured to turn her mind, they near the close say, "If you *will* forsake the church, you must answer for it." In which, their putting a mark of distinction as they do upon the word *will*, plainly implies a judging her to be governed by will instead of conscience, if she does not yield to their arguments.

Now if, to strain an expression, and make a man an *offender for a word*; * if attempts to strip such as appear against the evils of the times, of truths which they hold, and to load them with false accusations, and then to charge them, or such as join with them, with wilfulness in their way, were things peculiar to Berwick, I should not have exposed them thus to the world: But this is so much the picture of modern liberty and charity, that a holding of it up to view may possibly be of service to others. And though many may think this picture sufficiently odious already, yet the finishing stroke is still behind; which is for the secular arm to finish what the church has begun. The church has declared the Baptist to be irregular, therefore the secular power still *force* them to support the worship which they conscientiously dissent from; for this end the public teacher of the Baptist church in Berwick, and one of the society, were seized and carried prisoners to York last winter, and they informed me that when they attempted to have the case tried at April court, it was shifted off by a pretence that the chief Judge might not sit because he lived in Berwick, though the Baptists desired he might sit: And

* Isa. 29. 20, 21.

And as there was not enough to make a court without him, the other party could hereby prevent the case from coming to the Superior Court until another year. This is done by men who pretend to allow liberty of conscience to others as a darling point ! And things of like nature are done in various parts of the land ; of which at present take but two instances more. One is in the district of Montague, in the county of Hampshire, where is a Baptist church of many years standing ; yet their neighbours force away their estates from time to time, to support a worship which they cannot join with : And I was informed by a credible Gentleman who was present, that when one of that church sought for relief at last August court, the chief Judge (who was honor'd with that commission in consequence of his being one of the 17 *rescinders*) was instrumental of turning the case against him, by such a cant as this, viz. That the plaintiff was one of the signers of their certificate, and there was not the number which the law required without him. According to which, it is only for any people to distrain first upon one of the committee, and then they may fall upon the rest of the society as they please, as they have done at Montague since in a barbarous manner.

The other instance is at Ashfield, in the same county, where a Baptist church was constituted and a minister regularly ordained in the year 1761, when they were the major part of the town ; and they have maintained divine worship among themselves ever since ; yet a number of a different persuasion coming into the town afterward, and a few who were there before, with the help of non-resident proprietors, brought in a minister of their own sentiments, and have taxed the Baptist minister and his

society towards his settlement, salary, and building their meeting-house, for which they have forced away from them at several times to the value of *ten Pounds* lawful money on each right ; and tho' the Baptist petitioned for relief to the General Court in May 1768, and obtained a vote that they should notify the town and proprietors of Ashfield, to shew cause, if any they had, why their petition should not be granted, at the next Session of the court, and that the further collection of taxes from the petitioners should be suspended in the mean time ; yet no sooner were they gone home, but their opponents the next week * obtained an Act to enable them to lay their ministerial taxes upon all the lands in said town, let them be in whose hands they would : In consequence of which, they posted and sold last April at public vendue, for a very small part of their value, mowing land, winter grain, orcharding, one dwelling-house of a poor man's, and their burying place, in the whole about 400 acres ; by which means, as they say in their petition to our General Court, “ We are not only deprived of liberty of conscience, which our most gracious Sovereign has granted us in common with other his loyal subjects (which we have a right to in religion and reason) but we are also in great measure disinherited, and in a fair way to be turned naked into the wide world ; we humbly beg leave to say, These things are hard ; very hard ! for if we may not settle and support a minister agreeable to our own consciences, where is liberty of conscience ? And if we may be allowed that liberty, which is most reasonable, by what law, or with what equity, are we *forced* to pay for the settlement

* Chiefly, as I am informed, by means of the same Judge that turned the case against them at Montague.

“ settlement of another with whom we cannot in
 “ conscience join !”

These people (as they say in said petition,
 “ A considerable part of us settled on our lands in
 “ this town before the last war, and endured a great
 “ deal of hardship in the war, in building a fort
 “ upon our own cost, and defending ourselves for
 “ some years, without any help from the province,)”
 have been at a great deal of pains and expence in
 applications to our General Court from time to
 time, and this very year have been at the expence
 of no less than five journeys down above an hun-
 dred miles for that purpose, were at their Session in
 the spring before, and in the time of their lands
 being torn from them, which they had cleared with
 the peril of their lives, because of the sword of the
 wilderness ; yet have got no relief, nor any en-
 couragement of it, but the contrary. And some,
 to justify their conduct, plead that those lands were
 granted upon condition of settling and supporting
 that religion ; and there are ministers who, instead
 of pursuing *peace, prepare war* against those who
 will not *put into their mouth* ; and, as Mr. Locke
 observes, “ That magistrates should thus suffer these
 “ incendiaries and disturbers of the public peace,
 “ might justly be wondered at ; if it did not appear
 “ that they have been invited by them unto a par-
 “ ticipation of the spoil, and have therefore thought
 “ fit to make use of their covetousness and pride,
 “ as a means whereby to encrease their own power.
 “ For who does not see that *these good men* are in-
 “ deed more ministers of the government, than
 “ ministers of the gospel.”

And that great reasoner justly observes, that
 “ The business of laws is not to provide for the

“ truth of opinions, but for the safety and security
 “ of the common-wealth, and of every particular
 “ man’s goods and person. And so it ought to
 “ be ; for truth certainly would do well enough if
 “ she were once left to shift for herself. She sel-
 “ dom has received, and I fear never will receive,
 “ much assistance from the power of great men ;
 “ to whom she is but rarely known, and more
 “ rarely welcome. She is not taught by laws, nor
 “ has she any need of force to procure her entrance
 “ into the minds of men. Errors indeed prevail by
 “ the assistance of foreign and borrowed succours.”

Again, says he, “ To give laws, receive obedi-
 “ ence, and compel with the sword, belong to none
 “ but the civil magistrate ; and upon this ground I
 “ affirm, that the magistrate’s power extends not
 “ to the establishing of any articles of faith, or forms
 “ of worship, by force of laws. For laws are of
 “ no force at all without penalties.” “ The care
 “ of souls cannot belong to the civil magistrate, be-
 “ cause his power consists only in outward force :
 “ But true and saving religion consists in the inward
 “ persuasion of the mind ; without which nothing
 “ can be acceptable to God.”

These and many other convincing observations
 Mr. Locke has made, in his letter concerning tole-
 ration ; but I have a greater authority than his to
 produce against these oppressive measures ; even
 that of Zion’s King, who compares the setting up
 of his kingdom in the world to the sowing of good
 seed in a field ; after which an enemy sows tares ;
 which when the servants discovered, they were for
 gathering up the tares, but he said, *Nay ; lest, while*
ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat with
them : let both grow together until the harvest.

Which

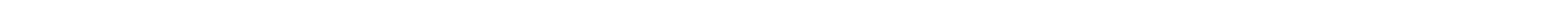
Which parable he has explained so plainly, that we may well be astonished at the conduct of some who pretend to be his servants, and yet dare to contradict him ; so much that the field which he says is *the world*, they say, is the *church* : according to which, if any appear by *their fruits* to be children of the *wicked one*, they must still let them alone in the church, instead of *putting away* from among themselves such wicked persons, as he has commanded, 1 Cor. 5. 13. While they stir up the civil magistrate to *root up* or punish such of their neighbours in *the world*, as will not support their religious schemes. Here then, though we suppose we might lay as just a claim to the character of loyal subjects, and good christians, as our neighbours ; yet let them suppose the best for themselves, and the worst for us that they possibly can ; let them call themselves children of the kingdom, and us children of the wicked one, and at the same time forcibly deprive us of any of our worldly goods and privileges, because we don't conform to their religion ; how can they answer it before the king of Kings, and lord of Lords ! How dreadfull do they run upon the sword which proceedeth out of his mouth, that says, " Let both grow together until the harvest ! "

I am very far from charging this upon any whole body of people, and fully believe that there are many of the common denomination in this country who truly regard the rights of conscience, and abhor oppression ; and in many places our people enjoy liberty and live in peaceable good neighbourhood with others ; yet the violations of the rights of mankind are so great in other places, that it is high time that something was more effectually done against them, than has ever yet been done in our land ; for those
which

which have been called laws in our favour, have never been enforced with penalties, which has emboldened many to break them ; and indeed Mr. Locke says, “ laws are of no force at all without penalties.”

Some would accuse us of being enemies to our country, because we move in these things now ; though if regard to our country had not prevailed above our private interests, possibly the court of Great-Britain would have heard our complaints before this time : However, let our accusers turn the tables, let them hear their oppressors exclaiming from year to year against being taxed without their own consent, and against the scheme of imposing episcopacy upon them ; while the same persons impose cruelly upon their neighbours, and force large sums from them to uphold a worship which they conscientiously dissent from, and then see if they will sit still until their oppressors have got fully established in their power, before they seek deliverance from their yoke ; for this is truly our case. And as the honorable Edward Goddard, Esq; (who was formerly one of his Majesty's council for this province, and whose motto adorns our title page) says,

LORD majority would claim the purse,
For his incumbents : than which nothing worse,
LORDLY diocesan, himself, can claim :
So these two Lords do differ but in name.
One pleading English laws, for his support ;
The other feigning acts of our own court.
Alledging law, in a perverted sense,
To render^s CHARTER grant, a mere pretence ;
And as if law and charter both intend,
To crush one church, another to befriend :
They'd make them mean, the same that *Pharaoh* said,
Go serve the Lord, but let your flocks be stay'd.
But if one church be tax'd, to serve another,
No matter whether done by this or t' other.



Copy of a Church-censure that was past upon Mr. Lord, by the North Church in Berwick.

AT a church-meeting August 11. 1767. It was desired that Mr. Abraham Lord give his reasons of absenting from the communion of this church. And 1st. He said, That he could not approve of the church's admitting many persons to have baptism for their children who are of various characters, as he said they did ; and that he did not know of any distinction between owning the covenant and coming into communion, and believed there was but one covenant. 2dly. That he saw a spirit of opposition against the spirit of God in the church, in keeping out some preachers, and depriving the members of hearing, and improving their gifts. Which being considered by the church, the question was put, Whether the church look on these reasons as sufficient to justify his absenting from our communion ? Voted in the negative. The consideration of the matter referred to the next church-meeting.

Sept. the 8th, the church met according to adjournment, and 1st. entred upon the consideration of the case of Mr. Abraham Lord ; and voted, That Mr. Abraham Lord be declared to lie under the public offence of this church, and be withheld and suspended from the holy fellowship of the Lord's supper, and from all special ordinances and privileges of the church, until his offence be removed by penitent confession.

A true copy of the church's proceedings with regard to Mr. Abraham Lord, according to record.

Attest.

Berwick, North-
Parish, Sept. 11.
1767.

Matthew Merriam, Pastor.

(Here

(Here follows a copy of Mrs. Lord's letter to that Church.)

To the reverend Pastor and Brethren of the North Church in Berwick.

BEloved in Christ, as I have no desire nor intent to give any offence in the least, I hope you will look on my request as reasonable, in desiring a dismission from this church to the Baptist church in Berwick. I have revealed my mind to one of the Elders of this church, and have waited some time, and have had no return. I will let you know the reason why I insist on it. I cannot sit easy here in your debaring one of the members of this church from the holy fellowship of the Lord's supper, and from all special ordinances and privileges of this church. You have intirely shut me out who am of the same way of thinking ; for tying the conscience in spiritual things is worse than parting with earthly enjoyments. As to the doctrines and discipline of the Baptist church, as far as I can conceive, it is agreeable to the word of God, and necessary for my salvation ; and to be plain, I cannot benefit here as I would desire. I am willing to take your results, as you shall think fit : As for commendations I look for none, knowing my self to be an unworthy creature. I beg your prayers for me, and though we cannot join in serving God here, I hope we shall all meet at the right hand of God, and there praise Him to all eternity. I heartily wish you the graces of God's holy Spirit, and rest, your's in Christ,

April 9.
1769.

Elizabeth Lord.

(Their

(Their Answer.)

To Mrs. Elizabeth Lord, member of the church of
Christ in the north parish in Berwick.

BEloved sister in Christ, your letter to us of April last has been laid before us, and we have considered thereon : And though an answer thereto has been delayed for a considerable time, yet we would not have you think that it is through a neglect of you ; but it was thought proper that some previous steps should be taken before a positive answer was given ; as we would leave no suitable christian means untried to remove what we esteem your false opinions, which are grounds of your request of a dismissal. And indeed the subject of your letter is such, and your mind is (as we conceive) so much turned aside from the truth, that after labouring with you to reclaim you by a committee of the church, it may be considered as a prudential act, and an act of kindness and tenderness to you to delay an answer, that you might have opportunity to think better of the subject, and to return to your duty before you had wholly gone off and forsaken the communion of the church of Christ, with which you solemnly covenanted : praying that God would lead you into the truth, and deliver you from error ; we hope that you do by this time at least begin to think better.

As to the principal subject of your letter, which is your requesting a dismissal from this church to the Baptist church in this town, we having met twice and deliberated thereon, judged it inconsistent with our covenant-engagements and christian communion ; accordingly voted, That we cannot see our way clear to comply with your request, by giving

C

you

you a dismissal from this church to the Baptist church in this town.—There are several reasons which (as they appear to us) render it improper and what we ought not to comply with, to give you a dismissal in the manner which you request.—1st. We cannot but esteem your motives thereto, in part at least, to be very wrong, and that you labour under a very mistaken apprehension of things in the reasons which you give therefor.—You say, the reason why you insist on it is, That you cannot sit easy here ; and that the reason that you cannot sit easy here is, that we have debarred one of the members of this church from our communion, or to that purpose ; whereby you say, we have shut you out, who are of the same way of thinking. We must suppose that you mean your Husband, when you speak of one of the members of this church being debarred, with whom you say, you are of the same way of thinking. But if you think that he was debarred for any opinion at all, you have quite mistook the thing :—It was not for one opinion more than another, but for the neglect of an important christian duty, viz. attending upon the Lord's supper, a neglect which had long been persisted in, while you continued to commune with the church therein :—And it was for this neglect, and not for any different opinions, that we dealt with him in a way of discipline, as we thought it to be our duty from our obligations of a brotherly watch for his good to edification. As to his differing from us in his sentiments about Baptism, he did indeed at the church-meeting just suggest that he began to think differently, or was under some doubt, but did not insist on it at all as a reason for his absenting from our communion before :—His being suspended does not therefore

therefore at all relate to you, or shut you out from the enjoyment of any and all the ordinances and privileges of the church ; unless you are affected with it merely because he stands in the relation to you of your husband. But if that is the case, we must tell you that we think you are very wrong therein ; for in Christ's kingdom we are not to be influenced by any such relations ; but to deny and forsake them all as to acts of spiritual communion, if his honor and the truth and purity of his gospel require it. To this purpose is that saying of Christ in Luke 14. 26. " If any man come to me, and hate not his father & mother, and wife and children, brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Which *bating* can mean nothing short of a disregard of them in comparison of Christ and his gospel, and a hearty readiness to oppose them, and bear testimony against them, wherein they forsake the truth and their duty : We conceive therefore that your motive for leaving us arising from hence, is very wrong. And if you are disposed in any measure to change your opinion, or to think more favourably of the Baptist principles, or to leave us and go to them on account of the censure past upon your husband, you are certainly quite wrong therein, in not being led by truth, but by partiality and prejudice in favour, which you ought not to be governed by. We do not say that this is the case with you, but advise you to examine yourself.

As to what you say of *tying the conscience in spiritual things*, we can hardly think what you refer to.—It is what we intirely disallow and protest against, and are not sensible of doing it ; but if you can convince us of having done it we are ready to

remove that objection : You cannot therefore have any reason or motive from hence to forsake us.— Liberty of conscience we claim ourselves and allow others, as a darling point ; and therefore must not be *forced* to do any thing contrary to *our* consciences, nor be thought to tye the consciences of others by *not consenting* to what we cannot think to be for the honor of God and interest of religion.

As to your opinion concerning the doctrines and discipline of the Baptist church, both that they are agreeable to the word of God, and necessary for your salvation, we are truly sorry for your mistake, and that you appear to be so uncharitable, by saying, what seems to cut off the whole Christian world, except the few who are of the sect of the Baptists from your charity and hope of their salvation : But we trust that if you carefully and seriously attend to and consider this opinion with its consequences, you will not abide by it : We trust you would not designedly say or do what would shut out from salvation or deny salvation to the apostles who baptized whole households upon the faith of the head or heads of the family, or deny the salvation of those who were baptized by them, and of all the primitive christians who (according to ancient history) for three or four centuries universally practised infant-baptism, and none denied it. Which that it was practised by the apostles and primitive christians may be also concluded from the universality of the practice ever since, and at this day among all the sectaries of whatever denomination in Christendom, except the small sect of the Baptists, comparatively with the whole small indeed : For however some of the other sectaries have warped off from the gospel in other respects, yet they all agree in this, who
hold

hold to any outward ordinances, viz. The baptism of infants as being of divine right and authority. And the universality of agreement in this practice among all sectaries, how different soever, & opposite to one another, except the few Baptists, strongly argues in all reason that it is a practice of early date, and took its rise with the christian dispensation, that it was taught and practised by the first founders of it. We trust you would not deny the salvation of all who have practised and do still practise infant-baptism and sprinkling ; among whom (if we judge by the proper evidences and marks of true piety and sanctification) there have been and are still many, not only real christians, but eminent christians, and among whom there have been many eminent ministers, whom God has evidently own'd and bless'd, and which way God has evidently own'd and bless'd by bringing home many souls therein. It seems therefore that God himself does not esteem the doctrines and discipline of the Baptist church to be necessary for salvation, wherein they differ from us, and that he has made it appear that they were not necessary for the salvation of the primitive christians, or christians of later ages, or christians of these days. You seem indeed aware of this even while you desire a dismissal from us to the Baptist church, and express that you think their doctrines and discipline to be necessary for your salvation ; this appears in your styling us, *Beloved in Christ, desiring our prayers for you, and hoping that we and you shall meet at the right hand of God, and praise him to all eternity* : All which are expressive of your charity for us, and hope of our salvation in the way that we are in, as you say, *Though we cannot join in serving God here, I hope, &c.*—We must put you in mind of your incon-

inconsistency, and therefore your error in this point, regarding not so much an inconsistency in writing as in your sentiments and practice : You stile us, *Beloved in Christ, desire our prayers for you*, and hope we shall meet together at God's right hand, and yet desire to leave us, intimate that you cannot have communion with us, and that you think other and different doctrines and discipline from what we receive and practise are necessary to salvation, that is, to *your* salvation, which term *necessary to salvation*, implies that you think that you cannot obtain salvation without embracing those doctrines and that discipline : But how is it that they are so necessary for your salvation, when so many people have been christians, and have been saved, and others may yet be saved in a different way, and you yourself express your charity for us as *christians*, and hope of our salvation, who do not embrace those doctrines and that discipline, and continuing not to embrace them ? Why are they so necessary for your salvation, and not at all necessary for the salvation of others ? Or why, if we are christians and beloved in Christ, and a true church of Christ, [* as you express yourself in your letter, and private conversation to the church's committee compared together]—if so, why do you desire to leave us, why can't you have communion with us, why can't you sit easy here, how can you esteem other and different doctrines and discipline necessary to your salvation, and by renouncing your baptism, and all your former professions, do that which will deny any communion with us, and that we have any right to the name of a church of Christ ? Can your views of things be right, can your motives be good, which induce you to do this ? Can they be

* This Mr. Lord and his wife declare is not true.

be approved of God ? How can you lay such a stumbling-block before the children of God, the church of Christ, even so large a body of his disciples, as the whole number of those who practise infant-baptism and sprinkling ? If our *baptism* is null and void in the sight of God, then our ministry and ordinances are so too, a meer nullity, or what is much worse, a profanation ; God therefore does not own them nor concur with them in his influences, there can therefore be no hope of our salvation in our way of administration. Whatever excuses you may be so kind as charitably to make for us on account of our want of light, and labouring under the prejudices of education, so as to hope that we may be accepted and saved ; yet, alas ! they won't help us : But your professed principles and practice in renouncing your infant-baptism [if our character and final state was to be determined according to them] would not only shut us out of a church-state, but out of heaven itself ; we could not hope to receive a blessing in our way of administration, or to be accepted of God to eternal life, persisting therein. If it be indeed, as the plain language of your new principles express, or (in other words) if your new opinions be true according to the gospel, there is no hope for us persisting in the way that we are in :— But to support our confidence, we may safely say, If our method of administration of ordinances is not valid, and God does not own them, he never own'd any in the christian dispensation, and hath no true church upon earth, as we have the witness of multitudes, who well evidenced their faith, and the blood of martyrs in various ages in our favour ; yea multitudes of those who were in our way of administration, who bore testimony to the truth of the religion
which

which they professed unto the death, triumphing over that last enemy in the sure and lively hope of glory : To which we think we may add, the witness of the holy Spirit to us in his concurring influences and blessing with the word and ordinances ; from whence we firmly conclude that he owns them.

We suppose indeed that you think yourself to have been a christian for a number of years ; if so we trust you won't deny the agency of the Spirit of God in making you a christian : And his ordinary way of operation is in the way of the means of his own appointment ; and no doubt he acted consistent with himself, and in his usual way of operation, when you was brought home, if indeed you be a christian ; which was while you continued under the administration of ordinances, which we profess and practise : In consequence of which operation [we suppose] you was induced to join in full communion with the church in this way, and so continued for a number of years without a difficulty upon your conscience as to your baptism, that we were ever sensible of. You will perhaps say, that you have since gained farther light as to the ordinance of baptism, and find that you are still unbaptized : But can that be *true light* which induces you to renounce your baptism, and that administration of ordinances, as a meer nullity or profanation, which God has thus owned and blessed ? To you, or that ministry, in attendance upon which God has bestowed upon you his saving influences, and enlightened you with the light of life ? To suppose that the Spirit of God who owned the administration of ordinances which we practise, does now lead you to renounce your baptism, this administration of ordinances and these churches, is to suppose that
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the Spirit of God acts contradictorily to himself, and owns two directly contrary methods of administration, one of which being a total subversion or overthrow of the other : Which supposition needs no farther confutation, than the bare mentioning of it. Therefore, unless you can deny that God did ever concur in his influences, and afford his blessing with our method of administration, either to you or others, you are constrained and bound to confess that you are not now led by the Spirit of God in renouncing your baptism, and therewith our administration, ordinances and churches : And if you are not led by the Spirit of God herein, which operates in and by the word and ministry of his own appointment, you are certainly wandering out of the paths of truth, in the wilderness of error, in this respect, wherein you have lost the true guide, in renouncing the administration which God owns. Therefore as you acknowledge and own us in your language as christians, and a true church of Christ, and that we may be saved in our way, the inconsistency of your practice, we must think, is a proof of your error in those sentiments, and that practice which denies any communion with us, and virtually speaks and says, That we are in a state of Heathenism, that we have not so much as the visible signs, and deserve not the name of a church of Christ.

And we have farther to add, 2dly. That we esteem the *act* of your leaving us and going off to the Baptist church, and complying with what they demand of being re-baptized, to be very wrong. Baptism, if it is considered in scripture light, we conceive is to be esteemed an initiating ordinance, a sign and seal of initiation or introduction into the visible church of Christ ; and as such it is not to be repeated. It

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is absurd, as common sense and reason teaches, to suppose two initiations by the same sign. If a person has been once initiated by baptism into the visible church, he is then a member of Christ's visible kingdom ; and however he may fall away and apostatize by sin or neglect of his duty, so as to forfeit the charity of the church, and so to require a public profession of repentance and solemn renewal of his engagements to be the Lord's, in order to be restored to the church's charity ; yet all this does not dissolve his baptismal bonds, and his relation to the church as a baptized person, or render him unbaptized, whether that ordinance was administered in infancy or adult years. It is in the nature of it an outward ordinance, and so far as it is an outward sign of initiation, it is never to be repeated when it is once performed. When Simon the forcerer fell after his baptism, and appeared to be an unbeliever, in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity, the apostle exhorts him to repent of his wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of his heart may be forgiven him ; but he says not a word about his being baptized again. See Acts 8. Whereas his exhortations to those who were unbaptized were, *Repent and be baptized*, Acts 2. 38. If you should say, That you was baptized in *infancy*, when you *knew nothing of it*, and was not capable of *believing*, and that it is therefore null and void : It may be answered, That your want of faith did not disannul your baptism as an outward sign, any more than Simon's unbelief disannulled his baptism.

Your baptism (we may add) is no more disannulled by its being done in your infancy, than the circumcision of the Jewish children at eight days old was rendered null and void by its being done in their infancy,

infancy, when they were incapable of believing ; whereas it was not expected that it should be *their act to believe* in the promulgation of God's gracious covenant, or to *offer themselves* to be circumcised, as they were not capable of acting, though the sign of initiation into God's covenant was enjoined to be performed to them by others : The same propriety there is undoubtedly in the nature of the thing, and in God's view in believers under the gospel consecrating and dedicating their infant seed unto God, by a sacred ceremony and seal, a seal which God has seen fit to enjoin as a seal of initiation into his visible church and kingdom under the christian dispensation. As God did once expressly command, viz. that under the old dispensation of the covenant of grace, that the infant seed of his visible people should be initiated into his visible church by an outward sign ; and as he has under the new dispensation not disannulled their right to the covenant seal, but on the contrary given us strong reason to conclude the continuance of the same right to that sign which is now the seal of the covenant, the seal of initiation, by various passages of scripture, particularly in styling the children *holy*, one or both of whose parents are believers, 1 Cor. 7. 14. not meaning (as we suppose) an inherent holiness, or holiness of nature, but a fæderal or covenant holiness, as being of the number of God's people, as being the children of the covenant ;—from these considerations, as well as other reasons which fall in with these, some of which have been hinted at in the course of this letter, we think we are bound to hold the baptism of infants to be of divine right and authority, and think that the validity of their baptism, when once baptized, cannot be denied : therefore your baptism,

we conceive, is not on this account to be repeated. We are sensible that there is great stress laid upon the particular mode of baptism by *plunging*, by some of the sect of the Baptists ; who say, That baptism by *sprinkling* is of itself null and void on account of the mode, and that it is no baptism :—But is it therefore no baptism, because it is baptism performed by sprinkling, or pouring water on the person, and not by dipping him all over therein ? And do you think your baptism to be no baptism on that account ? And is it for this reason that you say, that the doctrines and discipline of the Baptist church, as far as you can conceive, are necessary for your salvation ? This is truly to make the particular mode of baptism by plunging to be essential, both essential to baptism and to salvation —But by what authority do you make such a particular mode of baptism one of the essentials of religion, essential to baptism, and to salvation ? Have you your authority therefor from the scripture ? Has Christ or his apostles ever said so expressly, or said that from whence you may without any doubt infer it, and affirm it to be in the above sense essential, so as to declare all those who are not baptized in this way, but are baptized by sprinkling to be unbaptized persons, and in a state of heathenism, a state of estrangement from God and from the promises and privileges of the covenant of grace, so as to shut them out of the church and of Christ, and therefore out of heaven ? As this principle holds. We are fully persuaded that you don't find Christ or his apostles saying any such thing :—But if it had been essential, don't you think that Christ in his boundless wisdom and goodness to mankind, and his church would have clearly revealed his mind and will to us in that point, in his revelation which he committed

mitted to his church? No doubt he would,—as we have reason to bless his name that he has given us sufficient reason to think that every thing necessary to salvation is clearly and plainly revealed in the written revelation which God has of his abundant mercy given us.—“To the law, therefore, and to the testimony ; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.” *Isa.* viii. 20. We would therefore remind you that it is dangerous making things essential, which Christ has not made so, and making other laws, rules and terms of communion, besides those which Christ has made and enjoined :—This is to usurp the throne, the prerogative and authority of Christ, the only king and lawgiver of his church, and is also an high affront to his wisdom and goodness.

That water-baptism is an ordinance of Christ under the gospel dispensation, we firmly believe, as Christ has been pleased clearly to reveal it to be so : But as to the particular manner of administering it, whether by dipping or pouring water on a person, or sprinkling, we find nothing express in the institution, and think that Christ has left no positive command respecting it, leaving us at liberty to perform it either way as seem to us most convenient, and that we have full liberty to use either way of administration without giving offence to any christian, without giving occasion to any to withdraw from our communion, or incurring the censure of any as unbaptized persons, in a state of heathenism, having no regular ministry or ordinances, and having no right to the name and privileges of a church of Christ ; which is the plain consequence of holding that baptism by plunging is the only baptism, that baptism by sprinkling is null and void, and is no christian baptism ;

Baptism ; as you signified is your opinion.—We don't say, that baptism was never administered by John Baptist, or by the apostles, by *dipping*, though we are persuaded that it was not always, as where it appears, that some were baptized in the house, and where great numbers were baptized in a day ; upon which occasions dipping would be attended with great inconvenience, or even an impossibility : We are persuaded therefore that dipping is not essential to the ordinance, but that sprinkling of water on a person in baptism, is fully warrantable by scripture, that it was at least sometimes practised by the apostles and primitive christians, and is upon the whole to be chosen, as being agreeable to the mind of Christ, and that in *some* cases at least it *ought* to be used ; as when the other mode would be impracticable, or be attended with great inconvenience or danger of health.

But as to the practice of John Baptist, allowing that he baptized by dipping only, *that*, we conceive, is nothing to the present mode of baptism ; for his baptism was not the christian baptism, for the christian dispensation had not then taken place in the world, it being the baptism of repentance introductory to it, and practised before Christ entered upon his public ministry, see Matt. 3d and 4th chapters. It was not therefore the baptism of the new and christian dispensation, Christ not having yet instituted it : Hence the boasted argument comes to nothing at all, which some use to prove the necessity of being baptized by *dipping*, *That it is a following the example of Christ*, who they say, was baptized in that manner by John Baptist in Jordan, as it is said, *That he went up out of the water* : For that was not the baptism of the christian dispensation, and therefore it is

is no proof or evidence that he designed that we should follow him in that particular mode of baptism.

As Christ has not enjoined the particular mode of baptism, but has left us at liberty to use either plunging or sprinkling, or pouring water on the person to be baptized, we think baptism by dipping is *lawful* according to the scripture, though we don't think it enjoined or commanded ; and if any person appeared conscientiously to choose it, we could with a good conscience consent to the admission of members into our church, by their being baptized in that way, in case they had not been baptized at all. But to esteem it essential, or to admit a person to be baptized by dipping, who had been baptized by sprinkling, we cannot. And indeed for a person that has been once baptized by sprinkling, to renounce that baptism and be baptized by dipping, is at least a trifling with the sacred ordinance, and is but little, if any, short of a profanation of it ; and if you since you have been baptized by sprinkling, have renewed your baptismal covenant, and have communed with the church of Christ, should renounce all your former engagements to receive baptism by dipping, we esteem it that you would be guilty of great sin herein, even a trifling with or a meer profanation of sacred things. And if you are a christian, yet your conduct herein must be reckoned among those works, which are stiled *wood, hay, stubble*, which shall be burnt, by which you will suffer loss. And we cannot esteem it for the honor of God, for the interest of Christ's kingdom, or the safety of souls, that the sect of the Baptists, especially some of them, go about urging those who have already been baptized by sprinkling, to be re-baptized by dipping, thus teaching for doctrines the commandments of men,

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as that must be of man, which is not taken from the word of God, as enjoined there, and thus making the commandment of God, the institution authorised by God, of none effect by their traditions.

To conclude this our reply to your letter, we shall only add, 3dly. That however your mind may be so turned aside from the truth, as to think that you shall do right, to renounce your baptism to be re-baptized by being dipped, to forsake this church with whom you have solemnly covenanted to walk in christian fellowship, and to go off from us to the Baptist church, yet we do not think it to be our duty to *consent* thereto, by giving you a dismissal from us to that church ; but we think it to be our duty to *deny* it, to *bear testimony against* your so doing, and solemnly to warn you against it.—We esteem it no small matter for a person to separate from a church in any manner, with which he or she has solemnly covenanted to walk in christian fellowship ; an act which nothing but very weighty and grievous things lying upon the conscience, which they cannot remedy, can justify : But to add to this the renouncing the baptismal transaction and bonds, and all that a person has done to lay himself under obligations, all his professions and all that God has done for him heretofore, to be baptized by dipping, thereby practically declaring all the churches of other denominations to be no churches of Christ, this must be attended with peculiar and very great aggravations. Hereby the body of Christ is broken and torn, his members wounded and grieved, many whom you yourself cannot deny to be christians *despised* as being unbaptized, having no true churches, ministry or ordinances, and thereby is thrown a stumbling-block in the way of the disciples

ples of Christ : And on whom must the guilt here-
of lie ? Must it not lie on you ?

If you can *satisfy yourself* as to doing this, we repeat it, that *we cannot consent* to it ; we think it inconsistent with our duty to God our heavenly Father, to Christ our Lord and Redeemer, and to you our sister in the Lord, to withdraw our brotherly watch from you, and consent to your going off to a church with which we are not in communion as a church, it being set up in an irregular manner ; we think we should be guilty of great want of love, of brotherly tenderness and care so to do. But if you *will* forsake the church with which you have solemnly covenanted, and consent to join with the Baptist church by being re-baptized, *you must answer* for it.

We have a hope for you that you have built upon the true foundation, even Jesus Christ, but caution you not to build thereon this, *wood, hay, stubble*, lest you suffer loss by your works being burnt.—We hope and pray that God will purge you from any tincture of error, and lead you into all truth, that you may continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding ; and rest your Brethren in Christ,

(In behalf of the Church)

Berwick, Jan.

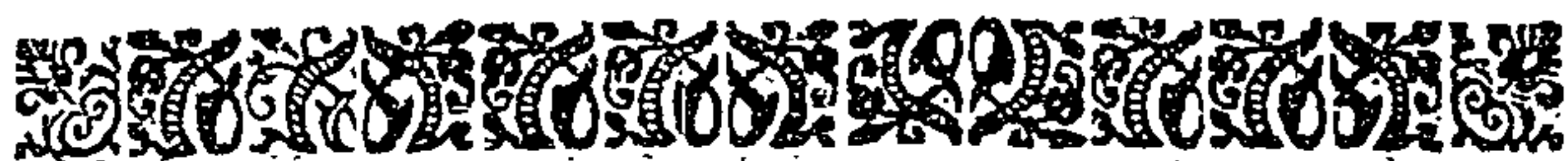
15. 1770.

Matthew Merriam;
(Pastor.



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To



To Mr. Matthew Merriam, of the
North Parish in Berwick, and to
the Church under his Pastoral
Care.

Men, Brethren, and Fathers,

BEING by divine Providence brought into this place, and being called to baptize Mr. Abraham Lord, and his wife, I thought it my duty to inquire into their character, as well as their principles and experiences ; and finding that he is under a censure of your church for withdrawing from your communion, and that she has had a long letter of warning and reproof from you, in answer to one that she wrote to request a dismissal from you to the Baptist Church in this town, it appeared to me expedient to return you some answer thereto : In doing of which I shall endeavour,

1st. To give the true state of the case between us. 2dly. To consider your method of supporting your principles. 3dly. Your notion of liberty of conscience.

1st. To give the true state of the case between us ; it is plainly this : We hold that baptism was instituted by Christ to be administered only to them who give gospel evidence of their being true believers ; and to be administered to such by *burying* in
water,

water, and not by pouring or sprinkling. But you hold infants as well as believers to be subjects of baptism ; and that “ Christ has not enjoined the “ particular mode of baptism, but has left us at liberty to use either plunging or sprinkling, or “ pouring water on the person to be baptized.”

This being the plain state of the case, I will proceed, Ildly. To consider your method of supporting your principles. And here, 1. You beg the very question in debate ; for you say, “ The apostles “ baptized whole households *upon the faith* of the “ head or heads of the family ;” and that, “ All “ the primitive christians (according to ancient history) for three or four centuries universally practised infant baptism, and none denied it.” Whereas the very point in dispute is, Whether the apostles baptized any *upon the faith* of the head of the family or not ? And for you to say they did without proof, is a notorious begging of the question. As for the Jaylor’s house, the scripture is express that they *spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house* : And that he rejoiced, *believing in God with all his house*, Act. 16. 32, 34. And the house of Lydia are called *brethren*, who were *comforted* by the apostles, ver. 40. And the household of Stephanus, were the *first fruits of Achaia*, and *addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints*, 1 Cor. 1. 16. and 16. 15. All which plainly bespeak their acting by their own faith, and not being baptized upon others faith ; and these are the plainest instances of household baptism, that we have in the Bible. And as to the primitive christians, instead of their universally practising infant-baptism, according to ancient history, it appears that we never have it named until the third century, and then St.

Origen,

Origen, who is one of the first that appeared for it, says, "It is for that reason, because by the sacrament of baptism the *pollution of our birth is taken away*, that infants are baptized." See Mr. *Peter Clark's* defence of infant-baptism, against Dr. *Gill*, pag. 111. And hence they (as appears by Mr. *Clark's* quotations) frequently called baptism *Regeneration*, from a mistaken notion that a being born of water, in John 3. 5. meant baptism: But if parents willingly bringing their children, and ministers willingly putting water upon them would regenerate them, that would contradict John 1. 13. which assures us, that we are not born again of *blood*, nor of the will of man, but of God. And your saying that none denied it, is not truth; for it appears by Mr. *Clark*, and others, that *Tertullian's* appearing against infant-baptism, is the first express account that we have of its ever being practised; and by the same account we find that the use of *God-fathers* and *God-mothers* therein, is of as early date as the practice itself. The apostle John tells us, that the *mystery of iniquity* did already work in his day; how far then had it prevailed when this custom was introduced, which, according to *Origen's* words, was built upon that antichristian doctrine, That the *sacraments confer grace*!

2. Having thus begged the question, you endeavour to frighten Mrs. Lord from embracing the Baptist principles, by representing that her so doing would virtually "shut out from salvation, or deny salvation to the apostles," and to the primitive christians, as well as to multitudes since. This consequence you endeavour to draw from her saying in her letter to you, that "As to the doctrines and discipline of the Baptist church, as far as I can conceive,

“ceive, it is agreeable to the word of God, and *ne-*
cessary for my salvation.”

But, pray Sirs, who would ever have drawn such a consequence therefrom; if they had not a prejudiced mind? Her words plainly include all our doctrines and discipline, and not those points only wherein we differ from other christians: And do any of you expect to be saved without embracing and conforming to the doctrines and discipline that you think is agreeable to the word of God? Or dare you act contrary to your consciences for fear of condemning good men's errors! The apostle plainly shews, that he that *doubteth* whether a thing be lawful or not, and yet doeth it, is *damned* or condemned, Rom. 14. 23. how much more must that person be so who acts contrary to what he is convinced is right? Mrs. Lord, in her letter, plainly express her belief of the salvation of other christians, which are not of her sentiments about baptism, while she esteemed it necessary for her to act according to the light which God had given her: This you try to represent as a great inconsistency, and carry things so far as to say of yourselves, that “If our baptism
 “is null and void in the sight of God, then our
 “ministry and ordinances are so too, a meer nullity,
 “or what is much worse, a profanation; God there-
 “fore does not own them nor concur with them in
 “his influences; there can therefore be no hope of
 “our salvation in our way of administration.”—
 This is a way which has been often used to frighten people from seeing with their own eyes, or from acting their own judgments; but I trust you will allow that circumcision was as necessary formerly as baptism is now, yet will you say that there was no hope of the salvation of all the Israelites, who were
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born in the wilderness for 40 years, who were not circumcised until after they came over Jordan? Josh. 5. 5. The feast of Tabernacles, which was one of the greatest ordinances in the Jewish church, took its name from the mode which God commanded it to be kept in, yet soon after they were settled in Canaan, they dropt that mode, and it was not recovered again for above a thousand years, even from Joshua's time until after their habitations had lain desolate 70 years, Neh. 8. 17. Solomon dedicated the temple at that feast, though because they had dropt the manner of keeping of it, from which it took its name, therefore it is there named only from the time of keeping it, viz. the *seventh month*, 1 Kin. 8. 2. Yet how great were the tokens of God's presence at that feast? Can any of you pretend to equal evidence of his presence in sprinkling for baptism, as Israel had at that feast? Or to any who have practised it, that equalled David for devotion, or Solomon for wisdom? Yet the poor captives who returned from Babylon, were not deter'd by such great characters from returning to an exact conformity to divine rule, Neh. 8. 14,—17. From these and many other scriptures, it appears that God owns and grants his presence with his saints, so far as they act in his truth, and yet will not hold them guiltless in retaining any error, or neglecting to act upon any truth when it is farther opened to them, even though that error had been held, or that truth neglected by the greatest or best of men.

The prejudices of education and natural affection are so great, that all the light and power of the day of Pentecost did not convince one of the apostles that they were to drop circumcision; and when another vision from heaven gave Peter farther light

in the case, the rest of the Church *contended with him* about it, until they were convinced also, Act. 11. 2, 18. So I expect our fathers and brethren will do with us about our forsaking infant sprinkling, until they are convinced of their error.

All your attempts to prove that either Mrs. Lord had not the Spirit of God with her when she held to infant-baptism, or else cannot have the same spirit in leaving of it, have not so much colour of reason in them, as they might have had who were zealous of circumcision, to say to Peter, That either he had not the spirit on the day of Pentecost, or else that he could not have it in going in to men uncircumcised.

3. You go on to endeavour to prove infant-baptism from Abraham's covenant. But here let me observe, that the priesthood in that church was as expressly limited to Aaron's natural seed, as ever church-privileges were to Abraham's posterity ; yea, and more so, for one admitted of proselytes, the other did not : And it is abundantly evident from the New-testament, that both Abraham and Aaron were types of Christ, and their seed types of the saints ; and I am fully persuaded that there is every whit as much warrant from scripture, to entail the ministry under the gospel to ministers natural seed, as there is to give special ordinances to the offspring of believers before they are converted. How vain is it then to attempt to build a New-testament ordinance upon an old-testament ceremony ? How inconsistent also is the method that is taken concerning 1 Cor. 7. 14 ? For it is held on your side that this text proves that the ceremonial law is abolished, by which the *Jews wives, and such as were born of them, were put away*, Ezra 10. 3. And you take
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the sense of the word *sanctified* from the gospel as we do, 1 Tim. 4. 3,—5. Yet you turn directly back to that abolished law for your sense of the word *holy*. We are commanded to make *strait* paths for our feet ; and if we regard it, we ought to know that the same law which called Israel *a holy people unto the Lord, above all people upon the face of the earth*, commanded them for that reason not to *make marriages* with other nations, Deut. 7. 3, 6. What *crooked* work then do they make who will take that law to explain the word *holy* by, in this very text which proves it to be out of date ! Pray consider it ; if our children are holy as Israel were, then marriages with others is unlawful ; but if such marriages are lawful now, then our children are not holy in that sense as they were.

4. As to the mode of baptism, I observe that you allow our mode to be good, but would have other modes to be good also ; to which I would say, We have not only plain accounts of their going into and coming out of the water, but are twice said to be *buried* by or in baptism, and all know that to be buried is to be covered. I know many say, this don't refer to literal, but to spiritual baptism ; yet when the same persons come to the meaning of the word baptize, they would refer us to spiritual baptism, which they say is by sprinkling or pouring ; but you know what is said of them that turn aside to *crooked ways*.

We are sensible that the word *sprinkled* is often used, but it is never applied to baptism in all the bible ; and you observe that those who speak not according to the law and testimony, “ it is because “ there is no light in them.” You need then to see what you are doing when you call that baptism which the Bible never calls so. We don't hold to re-bap-
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tizing any more than you do, but when we are convinced that what was formerly done under that name was not what the scripture calls baptism, we esteem it our duty to leave it though it were done by our dearest fathers, and to practise Christ's command ; and your own words are full in our justification herein ; for you say that Luke 14. 26. " Can
 " mean nothing short of a disregard of them in com-
 " parison of Christ and his gospel, and a hearty
 " readiness to oppose them, and bear testimony a-
 " gainst them, wherein they forsake the truth, and
 " their duty." — I come,

3dly. To consider your notion of liberty of conscience, where you tell Mrs. Lord, that you can hardly think what she refers to, when she speaks of your *tying the conscience in spiritual things* ; and you say, " Liberty of conscience we claim ourselves,
 " and allow others as a darling point." Yet you have laid her husband under church-censure, for not coming to your communion, although it appears by your records, that he gave reasons for his not coming, both as to your principles and conduct, which he
 " could not approve of ;" And when she tells you she is of the same way of thinking, you reply, that it was not for *any opinion at all* that he was dealt with in a way of discipline ; and say, " His being suspended
 " does not therefore at all relate to you, or shut
 " you out."

But in the fear of God, Sirs, what do you mean ! Has the admitting persons of *various characters* to bring their children to baptism, and into a half-way covenant, no reference to any opinion ? And if a person says, he sees " A spirit of opposition against
 " the spirit of God in the church in keeping out
 " some preachers, and depriving the members of
 " hearing, & improving their gifts ;" and therefore declares

declares he cannot commune with them for these reasons, and yet is censured by the church therefor; is that “allowing liberty of conscience to others as “a darling point !” Or when another declares they are burdened with the same things, can it consist either with liberty, or with *truth*, for the church to declare that the others case don’t *relate* to them *at all*, unless they are affected with it meerly on account of natural *relation* ; and so go on with a variety of injurious suggestions and representations, which are followed with warnings and reproofs, without ever giving the least satisfaction as to the points their consciences were burdened with ! If this be your church-order ; if this be your liberty of conscience, I must say as Jacob did, *O my soul, come thou not into their secret, unto their assembly mine honor be not thou united.*

I must add, that your representing that our embracing believers baptism, carries in it a “renouncing “all that a person has done to lay himself under “obligations, all his professions, and all that God “has done for him heretofore :” And your often accusing us with representing all others to be in a state of *heathenism*, are notorious falsehoods. Who will pretend to say, that Israel’s being circumcised at Gilgal, implied a renunciation of their former obligations, or of any thing that God had done for them in the wilderness, or any pretence that they were then in a state of heathenism !

Methinks upon a review you must also be shock’d at your saying, that the baptism which Christ and his apostles received from John, “was not the baptism of the Christian dispensation.” For we have not the least intimation that Christ or any one of his apostles ever had any other water baptism but what

they received by John, so that you had as good say, that neither of them ever received the Christian baptism !——I am willing to make all the allowance in these things, for remaining darkness and prejudice, that is consistent with that *charity* which *rejoiceth not in iniquity* but *in the truth* ; though I hope I may never give up the truth for any : And since you allow that a hating of fathers and brethren, in Luk. 14. 26. can mean nothing short of, “ a hearty
 “ readiness to oppose them, and bear testimony a-
 “ gainst them, wherein they forsake the truth and
 “ their duty ;” I hope you will not take it ill that I have taken the freedom to do so to you.

I have had but little time and advantage therefor, and am willing to have my mistakes corrected, but what is truth ought to be regarded for its own sake, and those who do not regard it must answer therefor before Him who is ready to judge the quick and the dead ; to whom I would commend you all, and rest
 your hearty Well-wisher,

Berwick, June

ISAAC BACKUS.

16. 1770.

N. B. We are as far from holding any external ordinances or doings to be of a saving nature in themselves, as any of you, while we look upon it of great importance to keep a good conscience, by acting according to the clearest light we can gain in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, and to leave those who are otherwise minded to him. And since your letter plainly holds forth that you have nothing against Mr. Lord, or his wife, but what relates to their religious sentiments and behaviour, I take that to be a recommendation of their moral character, and being satisfied in their religion, I think our way is clear to receive them to our fellowship, without giving just occasion of offence to any.

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 Postscript.

Postscript.

DEAR Sirs, as I had but little opportunity when in your town, to answer your letter, I would now add a remark or two more. The first is, That notwithstanding your professed regard to the divine oracles, yet you set up the practice of men above the example of Jesus Christ ; for, to support infant-sprinkling you say, “ The universality of agreement “ in this practice among all sectaries how different “ soever, and opposite to one another, except the “ few Baptists strongly argues in all reason that it is “ a practice of early date, and took its rise with the “ christian dispensation.” Though by the way the change of the feast in the seventh month, from keeping it in *tabernacles* to keeping it in their commodious houses, was more universal ; for I think we don’t read of a single dissenter from that practice in a thousand years ; unless the prophet is to be considered as one, who told this people, That the earth was *defiled* under them because they had transgressed the laws, *changed the ordinance*, Isa. 24. 5. And if you look into John 7. 44,—49. you may find that you are not the first who have advanced the authority of great men and the multitude, against a despised few ; nor the first that have slighted the example of Jesus of Nazareth, as you do in saying, “ As to the practice “ of John Baptist, allowing that he baptized by dipping only, *that*, we conceive, is nothing to the “ present mode of baptism ; for his baptism was “ not the christian baptism, for the christian dispensation had not then taken place in the world.*—

Hence

* If this arguing were good, then neither would it be any thing at all to us, how or in what manner Christ eat the Lord’s supper, for the Jewish dispensation was not then dissolved. What do men run into when they turn aside from truth !

“ Hence the boasted argument comes to nothing at
 “ all, which some use to prove the necessity of be-
 “ ing baptized by *dipping*, *That is a following the*
 “ *example of Christ.*” Thus the example of our
 divine Lord (though it perfectly agrees with that of
 Philip and the Eunuch, who went *into*, and came *out*
of the water) seems “ nothing at all” in your eyes,
 while the practice of the multitude since the anti-
 christian apostacy is so sacred in your view, that you
 say, “ For a person that has been once baptized by
 “ sprinkling to renounce that baptism and be bap-
 “ tized by dipping, is at least a trifling with the sacred
 “ ordinance, and but little, if any, short of a pro-
 “ fanation of it.”

Yea, secondly, you, Sirs, who unjustly judge Mrs.
 L. to hold water baptism as essential to salvation,
 notoriously condemn yourselves therein ; for you
 tell her, That whatever excuses she might be so kind
 as charitably to make for you, “ yet alas ! they,”
 “ won’t help us ; but your professed principles and
 “ practice in renouncing your infant-baptism [if our
 “ character and final state was to be determined ac-
 “ cording to them] would not only shut us out of
 “ a church state but out of heaven itself.” And a-
 gain you say, “ If our baptism is null and void in
 “ the sight of God,——there can be no hope of our
 “ salvation in our way of administration.” If this
 is not a holding external forms to be essential to sal-
 vation, I know not what can be so ; yea and such
 forms too as you are all forced to own, are built
 upon consequences and not upon express scripture :
 And it is a tradition which, as far as it prevails, in-
 tirely cuts off your children from the liberty of *an-*
swering a good conscience after they believe, by being
 baptized as their Lord was ; yet you are the men
 who

who accuse us of “ making the commandment of “ God, the institution authorised by God, of none “ effect by our traditions,” only because we teach believers who were formerly sprinkled, that they ought now to be *buried in baptism*.—Upon the whole, I leave it to be considered whether the stress of your long letter does not all turn very much upon this one point, viz That whatever ministers and churches have held & practised when they had God’s Spirit with them, can never be forsaken under the same influence. Which argument, however specious it has appeared to many, carries nothing less in it than that old Quaker notion, That when a person has the Spirit with him, he is then perfect ; for if he is not so, then there is no inconsistency in Peter’s being taught by the same Spirit to go in to the uncircumcised at Cesarea, who first taught him to preach to the circumcised at Jerusalem ; which was only a fulfilment of our Lord’s words, who told them that he had many things to say to them which they could not bear now ; but that the Spirit of truth should guide them into all truth ; yet many discover such strange ignorance of their bibles as to take this last clause to contradict the other with, as if the Spirit that guides into *all truth*, must do it all at once, instead of guiding in that path which *shineth more and more until the perfect day* !

Churchmen have made much use of this very argument for retaining all those popish ceremonies which were not reformed by such eminent Saints and Martyrs as suffered in Mary’s days : And indeed the nature of the argument is levelled against all further reformation, and verifies the observation of one of the most eminent fathers of this country, namely Mr. John Davenport, the first minister of
New-

New-Haven, who afterward died at Boston. He first fled into Holland from persecution, and was desired to settle there, but a principal reason why he would not, was because they (much as it is now in our country) admitted almost all sorts of persons to bring their children to baptism, therefore he determined to come here ; for, “ He observed, That
 “ when a *reformation* of the church has been
 “ brought about in any part of the world, it has
 “ rarely been *afterwards* carried on one step
 “ further, than the *first reformers* did succeed in
 “ their *first endeavours* ; he observed that as easily
 “ might the *Ark* have been removed from the
 “ mountains of *Ararat* where it first grounded, as
 “ a people get any ground in reformation, after and
 “ beyond the *first remove* of the *reformers*. And
 “ this observation quickned him to embark in a de-
 “ sign of *reformation*, wherein he might have oppor-
 “ tunity to drive things in the first essay, as near the
 “ precept and pattern of scripture as they could be
 “ driven.” See Dr. Mather’s *Magnalia*, B. III. pag.
 53. Accordingly, when in 1662, they, instead of
 pursuing further *reformation*, opened that way of
degeneration, the half-way-covenant, he gave both
 his verbal and printed testimony against it. I fully
 believe that many of the fathers of this country were
 truly built upon the Rock, but that infant-sprink-
 ling was among their wood, hay, stubble, which
 will be burnt up ; and I leave you to consider what
 a condition such are in, who have only their wood,
 hay and stubble, to build upon.

Middleborough,
 July 28. 1770.

3 AU 59

I. B.

