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ESSAY ON
BAPTISM,

BY THE
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IN THE

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On Infant Baptism.

THE question respecting infant baptism is one of the most important questions which can be discussed in the church of Christ. It resolves itself into the great question of infant church-membership. If God has not given to the infants of believing parents the right of church-membership, no human authority can give them such right; but if God has given to the infants of believing parents the right of membership in his church, no human authority is warranted in taking that right away. Indeed, to take it away would not only be an act of injustice, but an act of the utmost cruelty. It would in fact be the turning out of the children of the church into the world, to grow up amidst the dangers of the world; and the event, in all probability, would in many cases prove destructive of their immortal interests. Surely every parent will weigh the matter with great deliberation, before he perpetrates an act of such cruelty towards his own children.

It will perhaps be said, that by refusing to baptise infants, you indeed refuse them a place in the church, but that you leave them in the same families, and in possession of the same religious privileges which they would have had if they had been baptised. But if God has given these infants a place in his church, the foregoing answer, to say the least of it, contains a very insufficient reason for turning them out. Are we to suppose that God made them church-members for nothing? Are we to suppose that the binding of the parents by sacramental vows, in the presence of the church, to bring up their children for God, is nothing? Are we to suppose that the prayers of the church, and the religious inspection of church-government are nothing? And further, if God has made the appointment of infant church-membership, is there no reason to suppose that he will bless the observance of it; and frown on the contrary practice? Indeed, whilst I esteem and love the Baptists as a branch of the great christian body, I am constrained to say, that family religion does not prosper amongst them, as it does among some other denominations, nor does so large a proportion of their children become visibly pious.

But every thing in this controversy depends upon the question; whether God has or has not given to the children of believing parents the right of membership in his church; and that he has, is the point which we shall now attempt to prove; and when that is proved, their right to baptism follows as a matter of course. In entering on this discussion, however, I shall in the first place take notice of the most prominent objections which have been made against infant baptism. They

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are two in number, and they constitute almost the whole strength of the Baptist argument. The first objection is that for the observance of a positive institution, such as baptism, we must have either positive precept or example in the New Testament. To this I answer, that the general institution of baptism, as a sacrament, requires positive precept or example, or both; but in deciding the question, whether infants, or females, are proper subjects of baptism, or of any other christian ordinance, a fair or reasonable inference would be sufficient. There is neither precept nor example in the New Testament for female communion in the Lord's supper; and yet the Baptists themselves have no difficulty in their admission to the sacred table. And if it can be proved that infants are church-members, and this I calculate on proving, it will then be easy to show, that they are the proper subjects of baptism.

The next objection arises from those texts which require sinners to believe and be baptised, or our Saviour's command to "teach and baptise;" and as infants are not capable of believing, or being taught, it is concluded that they are not the proper subjects of baptism. But the error of the argument consists in this; all those texts, with their exhortations or commands, apply to adults, and were evidently intended to be so applied; and therefore to accommodate them to infants would be very unfair reasoning. Paul says, in a certain place, that "if any would not work neither should he eat." No one thinks of applying this to infants; and yet it would not be more unjust to do so, than to apply those other texts to infants, which were evidently intended for adults only.

The decision, then, of the whole subject depends on this, has God or has he not, given to infants the right of membership in his church? It is true of the church, as of all other institutions, that in order to understand its laws and constitution aright, we must go back to its origin. It is not necessary here to inquire whether God had a church in the days of Seth, when it is said, "men began to call upon the name of the Lord;" it is sufficient for our purpose to observe that the first setting up of the church, as a community separated from the world, by church rites, was in the family of Abraham. God gave to Abraham the covenant, or church promise, of which circumcision, to be applied on the eighth day of the child's age, was a seal; and in this way included the family of Abraham, infants and all, in his visible church, and separated them from the world. It is, however, to be understood that infants are members of the church in a similar way, and for purposes similar to those, for which they are made members of the State. The infant members of the civil State do not perform all the duties, or enjoy all the privileges of adult members; but their membership is conferred upon them for the purpose of education and training, that in due time they may be qualified for the performance of all the duties which will devolve upon them. The very existence of civilized societies depends on the education of its children to become its future members; and we are not

to be surprised that infinite wisdom has adopted the same principle in the church, and has chosen to make early education, not indeed the cause, but the most important means of continuing piety in the world.

As to the Abrahamic promise, there are two opinions. Those who believe in infant baptism are of the opinion that the Abrahamic covenant, as revealed in the 12th and 17th chapters of Genesis, was the covenant of grace, by which God first set up a visible church separated from the world; and that the substantial provisions of this covenant, among which is infant church-membership, continues in force to the present day.

On the other hand, those who oppose infant baptism believe that the Abrahamic covenant was a mere political promise, having respect principally to the land of Canaan; and that circumcision was only a political rite. Persons but little acquainted with this controversy will, I have no doubt, be surprised to hear, that my christians of our day entertain such opinions respecting the Abrahamic covenant and circumcision; but the truth is, infant church-membership cannot be opposed with any plausibility, without taking this ground.

But I shall now proceed to prove that the Abrahamic covenant was the church covenant. And this I shall do, in the first place, by the terms in which the covenant is expressed. The most important declarations of the covenant are, that in his seed all the nations should be blessed, and that God would be a God to him and his seed. This promise contains as much as any church promise could contain. If God was their God, merely in a visible external manner, this implies all that visible external church privileges could imply. If the expression, "I will be a God to thee and to thy seed," be considered in a spiritual sense, it certainly implies all the spiritual blessings of the covenant of grace. In whatever sense, then, we take the words of this covenant, they imply and contain a promise as full of grace as any promise that has ever been made to church members. It is true, there is also a promise of the land of Canaan, but this can be considered only as an appendage to the more important objects of the covenant. And indeed, if God intended to erect a church in the family of Abraham, that church must live in some country; and it was immaterial, as far as we can judge, whether he gave them the land of Canaan, the land of Egypt, or of Babylon. The important part of the covenant, from which it takes its name and character, was that "God would be a God to him and to his seed."

In the next place, I will prove that the Abrahamic covenant was the church covenant, or covenant of grace, from the 4th chapter of the Romans. The first ten verses of this chapter illustrate the manner in which Abraham was justified; that is to say, pardoned, and received into favour with God, through faith. And in the 11th it is specially mentioned, that he received the sign of circumcision; a seal of the righteousness of the

faith which he had yet being uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised, that righteousness might be imputed unto them also." If men when engaged in controversy could judge as others do, this verse alone would be sufficient to prove that the Abrahamic covenant and the covenant of grace were the same thing. Abraham was justified by his faith in that covenant; he received circumcision as a seal of the righteousness of faith, and became the father of the faithful, whether they were circumcised or uncircumcised. As to Abraham being the father of the faithful, the plain import of that term seems to be that he was the father and head of the household, in which the visible church was first instituted. And before I leave this point, I will request the reader to examine particularly this fourth chapter to the Romans; and then ask himself, whether the Apostle Paul, or the Divine Spirit speaking by the Apostle, could have intended to teach us, that the Abrahamic covenant was nothing more than a political institution, and that circumcision was only a seal of political privileges. In fine, let him ask himself whether such a supposition would not amount to a plain contradiction of the apostle's language.

3. We have evidence to the same point in Heb. 6. chapter, verses 13—14—17—18: "For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, saying, surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee." "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." From this passage it is plain that the oath recorded Gen. 22. chapter, verses 16—20, which plainly refers to the Abrahamic covenant, confirms those promises to which they become heirs who, under the preaching of the gospel, flee for refuge to the hope set before them.

My next quotation shall be from Gal. 3. chapter, 5—9 verses: "He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you; doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed. So, then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." From this passage the following things are manifest; 1, That those who wrought miracles and established the gospel church were actuated by the same faith which justified Abraham. 2, That Abraham was the father of the faithful in all ages; and 3, That the gospel was preached unto Abraham by way of preparation for justifying the heathen through faith;

or as expressed in the 14th verse, that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles. Now what was this blessing of Abraham which came on the Gentiles; or what was this faith of Abraham? Certainly no other than the blessing and the faith of the Abrahamic covenant; and the question is whether this was a mere political covenant, or the church covenant. It is further said that the promise was made to the seed of Abraham; "not and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed which is Christ." From this it appears that the Abrahamic promise was made to Christ as the Head of the church and as comprehending all believers in himself. Accordingly it is said in the last verse of this chapter, "And if ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Now it appears to me as plain as any thing can be, that the Apostle is here speaking of gospel blessings and of the gospel church. If he were speaking of a mere political covenant respecting the land of Canaan, and in which none but Jews could have any interest, it is plain that he would and must have used very different language.

But the truth is, I do not know any position held by good men, which contradicts more plain texts of scripture than that which makes the Abrahamic covenant a political covenant, and circumcision a political rite. Take almost any text in the New Testament in which circumcision is mentioned, and read the context; and you can make no sense of it, understanding circumcision as a political rite. For example, take such passages as these: "neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh" but "circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men but of God,"—Rom. 2. 28—29.—And, "we are the circumcision who worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh,"—Phil. 3. 3.—From these and many other such passages, it is evident that circumcision was a sign of spiritual blessings, and of course that it could not be a political rite. I will here ask a few plain questions which I think decisive of this controversy. When the believing Jews in the days of the Apostle, demanded circumcision for their children; did they demand it as a church rite or as a political rite? 2nd. If they claimed circumcision for their children as a church rite, was that not claiming church membership for their children?—3rd. And when the Apostles granted that claim, did they not sanction the belief of infant church membership?

What I have said makes it, I think, sufficiently manifest that the Abrahamic covenant was the gospel covenant, or that God established the visible church in the family of Abraham. And if so, infants, when circumcised, were made members of the visible church. And if infants are church members, infant baptism follows of course. For if we must receive them into the church, we must receive them by baptism, as baptism is the initiatory ordinance of the church.

We have now established the point that God has given to infants the right of membership in his church. And unless he has by some subsequent revelation put them out of the church, man has no right to put them out. It is not so intended, but it is in fact, an act of cruelty to put them out of the church. A pious Baptist would shudder at the thought of turning his children out of his house, and driving them from his home to perish in the wilderness. But when the children of the church are turned into the world, to grow up amidst its temptations and dangers, is there not reason to fear, that this will cause multitudes of them to perish in a still more important sense? Against these alarming consequences the doctrine of the divine decree affords no security; for the decrees of God always connect the means with the end.

As we shall now proceed to the New Testament evidence, I wish it to be understood that the burden of proof lies properly on our opponents. God, as we have seen, has placed infants in the church; and unless it can be shown that he has subsequently put them out of the church, they are church-members still. It could hardly be supposed that the change of dispensations, or the coming of our Saviour, would take away the church-membership of infants. Under the old dispensation, it was certainly esteemed among the most important privileges of believers, that their children were brought into a covenant relation with God as well as themselves. And certainly it could hardly be supposed that the coming of our Saviour diminished the privileges of his people. But the Apostle Paul in the 3d chapter of Galatians, 15—17 verses, puts this matter completely at rest. He says, "though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth or addeth thereto." And again in the 17th verse, "that the covenant which was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect." Now the giving of the law changed the church from the Patriarchal to the Mosaic dispensation; but the Apostle tells us that it did not change any of the important provisions of the promise. A change, then, from the Mosaic to the Christian dispensation, will not change the condition of the promise, and of course will not abridge the privileges of believers, or turn their children out of the church.

In examining the New Testament, instead of finding authority for destroying the title of infants to church-membership, we find much to confirm that title. It is mentioned by all the Evangelists, excepting John, that when they brought little children to our Saviour, that he should put his hands on them; his disciples rebuked those who brought them; but our Saviour replied, "suffer little children to come unto me; and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven, or of God." These words are recorded, Matt. 19, 14—Mark. 10, 14—Luke 18, 16. And although we will not say that they amount to a positive precept or example for infant baptism, they

evidently contain a plain assertion of infant church-membership. The words might be translated, rather more literally, perhaps, in this way; "suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for the kingdom of heaven or of God," is the property of such, or belongs to such as they. "The kingdom of God, or of heaven" has but two meanings: it either signifies the church invisible, the whole body of the redeemed; or it signifies the visible church on earth. Either meaning would suit our argument; but no doubt the lowest meaning, the visible church on earth, was what the divine speaker intended; and this exhibits our Saviour himself as positively asserting infant church-membership. All attempts to wrest this passage from our purpose have been unsuccessful. It has been said by some that the little children here spoken of were young believers. But this is refuted by the circumstance of our Saviour's taking them in his arms. It has also been asserted, with great confidence, that our Saviour meant nothing more than that these children, and all children, resembled in disposition the members of the kingdom of heaven; or of God. But let it be remembered, that the expression, "of such is the kingdom of God," contains the reason why our Saviour permitted these children to come and receive his blessing; and also the reason for his being sore displeased with his disciples for attempting to prevent their coming. There must therefore be something more than mere resemblance to believers in the case of these children; they must have been church-members themselves. Had resemblance been all, we know that believers are sometimes assimilated to sheep, to lambs, to doves, to serpents. But does any one think the mere similarity would have been a good reason for bringing these animals to our Saviour, as these children were brought, and that our Saviour would have been sore displeased with his disciples for attempting to prevent their being brought? And yet mere similarity in one case would have been as good a reason, as in the other. We must therefore believe that when our Saviour said, "of such is the kingdom," he meant what the words plainly imply, that little children, by the appointment of Heaven, are members of the visible church. It was natural after this for our Saviour to descend on the points in which children resembled believers; their humility, teachableness, and susceptibility of divine impressions, as these things illustrate the wisdom of placing infants in the church for the purpose of religious education.

In first Cor. 7, 14, we have a passage to which I will venture to say, that no commentator has ever been able to give a consistent sense, who did not make it mean infant church-membership. The Apostle was deciding the question whether believers and unbelievers ought to live together in the married state. And his language is this; "The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; else were your children unclean; but now are they holy." It is evident here that the holiness

of the children was a thing more obvious than the propriety of maintaining the marriage covenant between the parents, as it is brought forward as an argument to prove that the parents ought not to separate. This holiness, then, must have been signified by some usage of the church, distinguishing the children of believers from other children; and the most natural meaning (perhaps indeed the lowest meaning,) which we can give to the word holiness as applied to children, is consecrated to God, or set apart for God, and it implies the same thing with their church-membership. To suppose that holiness means legitimacy; as our Baptist brethren are obliged to assert, is altogether inadmissible; for this would make the Apostle a mere expounder of the Roman law; and besides children were legitimate under the Roman law, when both the parents were unbelievers. The only difficulty in the case is, to determine what is meant by sanctifying "the unbelieving husband" or "wife." I suppose it means very much the same thing, as when the provisions of the table, or any of the good creatures of God, are said to be sanctified to believers, "by the word of God, and prayer." Or it may mean still further, that this unbelieving parent, by the permission of God, is continued in a holy family, in which God dwells, and in which he applies to all the other members the visible seal of his covenant. In either of these meanings, the sanctification of the unbelieving parent would signify a certain degree of setting apart for God, or for the purposes of the church of God, which is the common meaning of the word here translated holy. But on the other hand, when our Baptist brethren render that word legitimate, they give it a sense in which the writers of the New Testament never use it.

The next thing to which I shall attend, is house-hold baptism. By this I mean the baptising of the household, when none but the head of it is mentioned as a believer. Such, for example, was the case of Lydia and the jailor. The case of Lydia is precisely in point. It occurs in the 16th chapter of Acts. It is simply mentioned by the historian, that "the Lord opened Lydia's heart, that she attended to the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptised, and her household, she besought us saying, if ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there; and she constrained us." If the members of Lydia's household had been baptised on their own faith, we should have expected the writer to have said so. And especially when Lydia besought the apostles to enter into her house, she would not have pleaded her own faith alone; she would not have said, "if ye have judged me to be faithful," but "if ye have judged us to be faithful." As the matter stands, the plain meaning of the narrative is, that Lydia alone believed, and the household was baptised on her faith. Such is the way in which we should understand a similar missionary narrative in the present day.

In this whole discussion, I have aimed at the utmost brevity. My intention was, to give some of the principal arguments in

the case, in the most concise form, hoping that a short essay might be attended to by those who would not read a long discourse. I trust nothing has been said which will give the impression that I am unfriendly to my opponents. I have a sincere esteem for the Baptist brethren, as a branch of the church of Christ. But I do consider them as holding an error which, unintentionally indeed, does great injury to the cause of piety, and to their own immediate offspring. If it be true, as I think has been proved, that the children of the faithful are the children of the church, and that God has given them a place in the church; which no man has a right to take from them, the turning of these children into the world, may prove the everlasting destruction of multitudes of them. I mention this not to intimidate weak consciences, but to bring my readers to an honest and serious examination of the foregoing arguments.

An conclusion, I shall say a few words respecting the mode of baptism. The mode is certainly not material. In both the sacraments, certain elements are used as signs of spiritual things. Water denotes the purifying influence of the Spirit in baptism, and the bread and wine in the Lord's supper denote spiritual food or sustenance. Now, if we do not idolize these symbols, but consider them merely as signs, to assist our faith by the sensible representation of spiritual things, the quantity of the element in each case can be a matter of no importance. In the Lord's supper, although it is called a supper, we do not require as much bread and wine as will make a meal; the least quantity of the element which can be tasted is sufficient for a valid administration. And so it is in baptism. If water itself could take away sin, the quantity might be important; but if it be only a sign, the least sensible quantity of the element is sufficient.

It is certain that there is neither precept nor example for immersion in the New Testament. The cases most relied upon in argument, are John's baptism, and the baptism of the Eunuch by Philip. Of John's baptism, it might be said, that it is not the christian baptism, as is evident from the 19th chapter of Acts, and therefore it proves nothing. But in the case both of John's baptism and Philip's, the expressions, "going down into the water, and coming up out of the water" — which might as well be rendered going to the water and coming from it, are principally relied upon to prove immersion.

But when it is recollected that these expressions are applied not only to the subjects, but also to the ADMINISTRATORS, who certainly were not immersed, the argument loses all its force.

In establishing a religious rite, which was to be used in all countries and climates, it would seem necessary to leave the mode indefinite. If immersion had been prescribed, we at once see how inconvenient, or indeed impracticable the mode must have been in polar regions, or even in our own climate during the winter season. Besides, if it had been intended to prescribe immersion, the Greek language affords words which would have expressed the thing in a definite manner; words

which are never used to express any thing but washing, dipping, or immersion. That the word which we translate baptism is not of that class, is evident from the 7th chapter of Mark, latter part of the 4th verse:—"And many other things there be which ye have received to hold, as the washing of cups and pots and brazen vessels and tables?" In this verse the word rendered "washing," is the word in other places rendered baptism; and when applied to pots, and brazen vessels, and especially to tables or couches, it certainly does not mean immersion.

It has always appeared to me that the baptism on the day of Pentecost could not have been by immersion. It was the third hour of the day, or nine o'clock, by our time, when Peter began his celebrated sermon. Various other discourses followed; for it is said that the eleven also were employed in the instruction of the people. It is not probable that they could have been ready for the administration of the ordinance before twelve. At three thousand persons were to be baptised by the twelve Apostles, this would give two hundred and fifty for each administrator. And if a profession of faith was to be received from each individual, and changes of raiment to be sent for, to every part of Jerusalem, three minutes of time for each subject would be as little as could be allowed. But three minutes to each subject would have required twelve hours and a half for the whole administration. And as the Jewish day ended at sun-set, if the baptism had begun at twelve o'clock, or even at nine o'clock, when Peter commenced his discourse, there would not have been time to complete it. These considerations have convinced me that immersion could not have been the mode of baptism on the day of Pentecost. There are also other difficulties. It is not believed that water could have been found sufficient for the hasty immersion of so many persons. Writers tell us that the brook Cedron is generally dry at that season of the year. Or if not dry, it would not have been fit for the purpose of baptism, as all the filth of Jerusalem was thrown by sewers into that brook, and lay in its channel until carried off by winter floods into the Dead Sea. It is also believed, that, without a miracle, no man standing in the water, and weakened by that circumstance, could endure the labour of immersing two hundred and fifty persons without intermission. Taking all these things into consideration, I think immersion could not have been the mode used on the day of Pentecost.

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