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I.

THE BELGIC CONFESSION AND ITS AUTHOR.*

THE usefulness and even the propriety of creeds and confessions have often been attacked in modern times. It has been said that they stand in the way of free inquiry and the progress of theological science; that they hamper the study of the divine word; that they interfere with liberty of conscience and the right of private judgment; that they lead to intolerance on one side and hypocrisy on the other; that they tend to perpetuate the divisions by which the Christian Church is distracted and weakened; that they embitter and intensify differences of opinion among brethren, and that not unfrequently they counteract their own aim and bring about an indifference to all dogma, and even a thorough-going scepticism. It is a sufficient answer to these plausible objections to say that the abuse of a thing is no argument against its use; that no man or set of men can possess true faith without confessing it; that a Christian society cannot exist without an organization, and this implies agreement in religious opinions; that according to the Scripture, error in doctrine

* AUTHORITIES:—1. *Kort Historisch Bericht van de Publike Schriften rakende de Leer en Dienst der Nederduytsche Kerken van de Vereen. Nederland.* Opgesteld door Johannes Ens Utrecht: 1733.

2. *Kort Historisch Verhaal van den Eersten Oorspring der Nederl. Gereform. Kerken onder 't Kruys. Beneffens alle derselven Leer—en Dienst—Boeken.* Door Isaac Le Long. Amsterdam: 1751.

3. *Golden Remains of Mr. John Hales,* London: 1659.

4. *La Confession de Foy des Eglises Reform. des Pais-Eas.* In two columns, one containing the ancient Confession, the other the Revision made at the Synod of Dordrecht. Published by order of the Synod of the Walloon Churches, held at Leyden, 1667. Leyde: E. Luzac, 1769.

5. *Guido de Brès. In Syn Leven en Sterven.* Benevens Eenige Brieven aan zyn Huisvrouw en Moeder. Naar het Fransch. Amsterdam: H. Höveker, 1835.

6. *Eene Bladzayde uit de Geschiedenis der Nederl. Geloofsbyydenis.* Door J. J. Van Toorenbergen. S. Gravenhage: M. Nyzhoff, 1861.

7. *Various articles by the Rev. A. P. Van Gieson, D.D.,* in the N. Y. Christian *Intelligencer*, during the year 1863. Also, his sermon in Centennial Discourses of the R. D. C., issued in 1876.

II.

THE SCRIPTURE WARRANT FOR THE BAPTISM OF INFANTS.

THE phrase *infant baptism*, though constantly used by theological writers, is not found in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, nor in any of the creeds and liturgies of the Reformation. We prefer to follow the usage of the Reformed Symbols, because there is reason to believe that "infant" as distinguished from "adult" baptism covers, in the popular mind, the fundamental error that there are two kinds of baptism, and that the ordinance as administered to infants is not, in the full sense of the word as defined in our standards, a Sacrament, but only a ceremony of Consecration. We hold with Paul that there "is one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. iv. 5): One in the correspondence between the outward sign and the inward meaning; one because it is not to be repeated, since regeneration which it signifies can be experienced only once; and one in the sense that it is indivisible, and cannot be lawfully administered except in the fulness of its significance, and to those who are fully qualified to receive it. For whatever right the church may have, in common with civil society, to institute new ceremonies in order to adapt her worship to the changing condition of men, she has no right to institute new Sacraments, or in anywise to alter or to modify the meaning of those Christ has ordained for all time. According to the plain testimony of Scripture, baptism signifies and seals "the forgiveness of sins and the receiving of the Holy Ghost" (Acts ii. 38); our engrafting "into the one body of Christ" (1 Cor. xii. 13); our "baptism into Christ and our putting on of Christ" (Gal. iii. 27). It is called "the washing of regeneration" because it symbolizes "the renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus iii. 5). We are "born of water and of the Spirit" (John iii. 5). We are "saved in figure by baptism" (1 Pet. iii. 21). We do not stop now to interpret these statements. We only insist that they apply equally to all the subjects of baptism. And if they do not apply to infants in the same sense, and

to the same extent that they apply to adults—if the Sacrament is not “the sign and seal of our regeneration and engrafting into Christ, *and that even to infants*” (Larger Catechism, 177), then the baptism of infants has no warrant in Scripture. We have no right to invent a new kind of baptism, nor to lower the symbolic meaning of that which is described and enjoined in Scripture, in order to justify the administration of it to our children.

For similar reasons we reject also the phrase, “believer’s baptism,” on which the opponents of the baptism of infants so strenuously insist. This catchword is a begging of the whole question at issue. If, in reply to this, they quote the words of Christ, “he that *believeth* and is baptized shall be saved,” we remind them that the salvation promised is as plainly conditioned upon believing as baptism is. If Christ’s words teach that only believers are to be baptized, they teach just as plainly that only believers can be saved. Are they prepared to adopt the phrase, *believer’s salvation*, as covering the whole purpose of God in redemption? What then becomes of infants dying in infancy? Which horn of the dilemma will they choose? If they insist that dying infants are in some sense believers, because by God’s sovereign grace the germs of faith are implanted in them, what becomes of “believer’s baptism,” as a ground for excluding infants from this sealing ordinance? But if they insist that infants cannot in any sense be regarded as believers, and are therefore to be excluded from Baptism, how then, upon their principles, can any infant dying in infancy be saved? Does God bestow the reality upon those to whom he refuses the sign? Our Baptist brethren, blessed be their inconsistency, believe in the salvation of infants as strenuously as we do. By this heart-faith, which is infinitely better than their exegesis or their logic, they accord to those who cannot consciously believe or profess their faith, all that is symbolized by baptism; for surely they will not affirm that an infant can be saved without regeneration and forgiveness; and yet, by an epithet which has no warrant in Scripture, they exclude these subjects of salvation from the outward ordinance. They dare not insist on believer’s salvation, but they hold exclusively to believer’s baptism. Surely the salvation is unspeakably greater than the baptism, which is only its outward sign and seal. The same Jesus who said, “Except a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God,” took infants into his arms and said, “of such *is* the kingdom of God.” And those whom he thus embraced in his bosom and his kingdom were neither dead nor dying infants. They were not children old enough to come to him of their own motion, but they were *brought* to him, and in the face of

rebuke from some of his disciples, he took them into his arms out of the arms of believing parents. The capacity of infants for salvation, and their relation to Christ and his redemptive work, as a ground for their Baptism, will be considered further on. We refer to it now only to justify our rejection of any qualifying or restrictive epithet as applied to Baptism. The subject of this article is not "Believer's Baptism," nor "Adult Baptism," nor "Infant Baptism," but the BAPTISM OF INFANTS.

We undertake to show that upon certain conditions, as clearly defined in Scripture as the conditions upon which adults are to be baptized, infants are the proper recipients of this holy Sacrament. For we agree with Calvin that "a sacrament has not a thread to hang upon, if it rest not on the sure foundation of the Word of God."

I. Before entering upon the discussion of the Scripture warrant for the Baptism of Infants, it may be well hastily to review THE HISTORY OF THE DOCTRINE: not as constituting a conclusive argument, but as presenting a strong antecedent presumption of the truth on the subject. With that kind of Protestantism which cuts itself loose from historic Christianity, we have no sympathy. Indeed, we have a profound conviction that the mission of Protestantism, as such, has been accomplished, and that the holy Catholic Church, in which we believe, can most effectually finish her work by the positive reassertion of that which was from the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. The traditions of the Church in all ages are entitled to our deepest respect, and ought never to be rejected except under compulsion of loyalty to the Scriptures as the supreme rule of faith and practice. Whatever has been held by the great body of Christ's disciples in all ages and lands, comes to us with a strong probability that it is in accordance with the mind and will of God, as revealed in his written Word. There is such a thing as catholic truth. There is a system of doctrine and practice which is entitled to be called orthodox; as embodying the common judgment, the spiritual discernment, the Christian consciousness, and experience of the holy Catholic Church. And if there is anything in doctrine or practice, which may claim to belong to this category, it is the right of Infants to the Sacrament of Baptism. From the days of the Apostles to the time of the Reformation, and through the Reformation period to the rise of the Baptist denomination in England, there is not in all Christian history or literature a line or a word of objection to the Baptism of Infants, *upon grounds with which evangelical Christians in our day can have a particle of sympathy.*

In the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Anabaptists of Ger

many, whose political and theological excesses brought such disrepute upon the Reformation under Luther, and against whom the great Reformer labored with voice and pen, no less zealously than against the errors of Rome, opposed the Baptism of Infants upon the ground that they are by nature holy and need neither regeneration nor the outward sign of it.

In the Tenth Article of the FORMULA OF CONCORD, we have a list of "Anabaptist articles which cannot be endured in the Church." Among these are the following :

"That Christ did not assume his flesh and blood from the Virgin Mary, but brought them from heaven ; that Christ is not true God, but merely superior to other Saints, because he has received more gifts of the Holy Spirit than any other holy man ; that our righteousness before God does not consist in the merits of Christ alone ; that infants not baptized are not sinners before God, but pure and innocent, and in this their innocence, when they have not as yet the use of reason, may without baptism (of which in the opinion of the Anabaptists they have no need), attain unto salvation" (Schaff's "Creeds of Christendom," vol. iii., p. 174).

In the beginning of the twelfth century, there was a small and ephemeral sect among the Waldenses who rejected the Baptism of Infants. Their leader and founder, Peter de Bruis, was addicted to that method of exegesis which consists in taking passages of Scripture addressed to a particular class of persons, and applying them indiscriminately to all.

The Apostle Peter says, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you ; infants cannot repent : therefore infants must not be baptized." A syllogism precisely analogous to this may be constructed upon Paul's words about working and eating (2 Thess. iii. 10): "This we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat." Nothing can be plainer or more explicit than this. It makes eating conditional upon working. Infants cannot work : therefore infants should not be allowed to eat. The exposition of Scripture which would deprive our helpless children of food because they cannot work for it, is quite as valid as that which cuts them off from the privilege of Baptism because they cannot repent and believe. Peter de Bruis carried out this method of reasoning much more rigidly than his modern imitators. He was not deterred by logical consequences. He first excluded all infants, as such, from salvation, and then he was entirely consistent with himself in denying to them the sign and seal of God's saving grace. He insisted that according to the precepts of Christ and his apostles none can be saved but those who deny themselves and take up the cross, and work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. From this he inferred that infants, as such, cannot be saved, and therefore ought not to be baptized. Cer-

tainly, if we grant his premises, his conclusions are irresistible. But who now will grant his premises? The sect he founded had but a brief existence; and in the Waldensian Confession (1655) there is not a trace of his opinions.

Going back in church history we do not find another recorded word against the universal practice of baptizing infants till we come to the writings of TERTULLIAN. This eccentric and fanatical father was born A.D. 160, and died not later than A.D. 240. He was a distinguished leader of the sect known in ecclesiastical history as Montanists, and an eloquent advocate of their ascetic views and practices. Though married himself, he denounced marriage as inconsistent with the highest development of Christian life and character. In a treatise dedicated with grim humor to his wife, while combating the love of offspring as a plea for marriage, he speaks of "the bitter, bitter pleasure of children," and calls them "a burden perilous to faith." He asks: "Why did the Lord foretell a woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck, except because he testifies that in that day of disencumbrance the encumbrances of children will be an inconvenience." He exclaims with bitter irony: "Let us marry daily, and in the midst of our marrying let us be overtaken, like Sodom and Gomorrhah, by that day of fear." By the day of disencumbrance and the day of fear he seems to mean the second coming of Christ, which he believed to be near at hand, for he declares that "the unmarried at the first trump of the angel will spring forth disencumbered, will freely bear to the end whatever pressure and persecution, with no burdensome fruit of marriage heaving in the womb, none in the bosom." *

We have often noticed, in the newspapers of the day, advertisements of "Board for gentlemen and their wives, *without encumbrances*," and had supposed that the phrase was an Americanism, and an invention of our modern boarding-house system, but it appears to have the sanction of an ancient Christian father. A man whose ascetic notions blind him to the holiness of marriage, as the analogue of Christ's relation to his Church (Ephesians vi. 23-33), will not be likely to understand the blessedness of the man who has his quiver full of children, nor to have any clear apprehension of the household covenant, with its holy seed and its baptismal seal. Tertullian is the author of the earliest extant treatise on Baptism. In this he earnestly advises against the administration of the sacrament to infants. His advice is based upon the assumption that Baptism of itself washes

* Ante-Nicene Library: Tertullian's Works, vol. i., p. 285.

away sins, and that sin committed after Baptism is mortal, inasmuch as the cleansing ordinance cannot be repeated. For the same reason he recommends its postponement in the case of adults. He says: "If any understand the weighty import of Baptism they will fear its reception more than its delay." *

Now, without considering the grounds of his objections, it is sufficient for our purpose to observe that Tertullian's arguments fully assume the prevalence of the Baptism of Infants in the Christian Church at the commencement of the third century. Many writers trace the evidences of the practice back to a much earlier date, to the writings of Irenæus the disciple of Polycarp, the disciple of John the Apostle, of Justin Martyr at the beginning of the second century, and even of Clement of Rome, and Hermas, who wrote in the latter days of the Apostles. †

But we do not care to insist upon this evidence. We are willing to fortify the historic argument at the narrow place where the first battery is erected against it. The fact and the mode of the attack concedes to us the whole territory between this point and the times of the apostles. Tertullian virtually admits that the practice of the whole Church is and has been against him. He does not assert nor insinuate that this practice is an innovation. He makes no appeal from the usage of the Catholic Church to the authority of Christ and his apostles, which he certainly would have done if there had been any ground for such an appeal. He pleads for the privilege of postponing baptism in the case of adults as well as of infants. "His arguments," says Bingham, "tend not only to exclude infants, but all persons that are unmarried or in widowhood, for fear of temptation; which are rules which no one beside himself e'er thought of, much less were they confirmed by any church practice." "His whole argument," says Dr. Schaff, "rests upon false premises, which were not admitted by the Church. His protest fell without an echo." The universal prevalence of the Baptism of Infants from the beginning of the third century onward, is proved by the clearest and most abundant evidence. Nor is there any lack of testimony as to the divine origin and authority of the practice. Origen, who was contemporary with Tertullian, declares that the Church "derived an order from the apostles to baptize infants," and that "according to the custom of the church, baptism is administered to infants; who would not need

* Tertullian's Works, vol. i., p. 254.

† See Wall's "History of Infant Baptism," and Bingham's "Antiquities of the Christian Church."

the grace of baptism if there was nothing in them that needed forgiveness and mercy."*

Cyprian, in his Epistle to Fidus, affirms that in the Council of Carthage, A.D. 253, the sixty-six Bishops or Pastors present, unanimously agreed that it is not necessary to postpone Baptism till the eighth day, which was the time fixed by the Mosaic law for circumcision, but that it might be administered at any time after birth, which gives us a clear proof, not only of the prevalence of the practice, but of the universal opinion in the church, that Baptism under the New Testament Dispensation takes the place of circumcision under the Old Testament.† Chrysostom, toward the close of the fourth century, says: "Our circumcision, I mean Baptism, comes without pain, and procures for us a thousand benefits, and fills us with the Grace of the Spirit; and it has no fixed time as circumcision had, but one that is in the beginning of his age, or one in the middle of it, or one that is in old age may receive this circumcision without hands." Augustine, in the beginning of the fifth century, says: "The whole church practices Infant Baptism; it was not instituted by councils, but was always in use." In his controversy with the Pelagians concerning Original Sin, which they denied, he dwells severely upon their inconsistency in baptizing infants, showing that the Sacrament can have no meaning as applied to those who are not by nature sinful. He says: "The Pelagians grant that infants must be baptized, not being able to resist the authority of the whole church, which was doubtless delivered by our Lord and his apostles." Other defenders of the orthodox faith were not as fair to the Pelagians as Augustine was. Pelagius himself complains of their misrepresentations. He says: "Men *slander* me by the charge that I deny baptism to infants. I never *heard* of any one, not the most impious heretic, who denied baptism to infants." Now, who can impeach the testimony of Pelagius on this point? If the practice of baptizing infants was so prevalent in the church in his day that he never heard of any one who denied it, surely this is a phenomenon which demands an explanation. How shall we account for it? Augustine and Origen declare that the practice was founded on the example and precepts of the apostles. And in their day, though the church was full of controversies, and men were no more bound then than they are now by prescriptive authority, this explanation was never questioned. If men now deny the explanation of the Fathers, this does not destroy the facts, which still remain to be explained.

*Our quotations from Origen, Chrysostom, Augustine, and Pelagius are taken from Wall's "History of Infant Baptism."

† Ante-Nicene Library, Cyprian's Works, vol. i., 196.

The burden of proof is on them. They are bound to show where and how the practice of baptizing infants arose, and above all to account for the fact that it was universally accepted by the church without opposition or protest. It is no sufficient answer to this reasonable demand to make general and sweeping charges of unsoundness against the Fathers, and to remind us that a great many corruptions crept into the church during the first four centuries. We admit, of course, that many of the Fathers erred concerning the faith, and that soon after the days of the apostles the church began to adopt many unscriptural practices. We admit also, for we have abundant evidence of the fact, that many of these errors in opinion and practice had reference to the doctrine and administration of baptism. But all this does not touch the question before us; which is, how the church could have passed from the baptism of none but adults to the universal practice of baptizing infants, without any recorded controversy upon the subject, and without leaving any historic traces of the change.

“When men so learned and so candid as Augustine and Pelagius, though earnestly opposed to each other in doctrinal opinions, agree in declaring that they never heard of any one who claimed to be a Christian, either orthodox or heretic, who did not maintain and practice the Baptism of Infants; to suppose in the face of such testimony that the practice crept in as an unwarranted innovation between their time and that of the apostles, without the smallest intimation of the change having ever reached their ears, is of all incredible suppositions one of the most incredible. He who can believe this must, it appears to me, be prepared to make a sacrifice of all historic evidence at the shrine of blind and deaf prejudice” (Miller on Infant Baptism, Presbyterian Tracts, vol. i., p. 28).

II. To the historic argument thus briefly recited, the most common and plausible answer is an appeal to THE ALLEGED SILENCE OF SCRIPTURE. We are told that the testimony of the Fathers is of no account. We are challenged to produce a single text of Scripture in which the Baptism of Infants is enjoined or permitted, or a single example of such an administration of the ordinance recorded in the Bible.

Even if we admit to its fullest extent the alleged silence of Scripture, which we are far from doing, this argument is more specious than sound. It has this fatal defect, that it proves too much. There are many things about which the Bible says nothing, which all Christians believe and insist upon.

Marriage is admitted by all Christians to be a divine institution. Church and State guard it as the foundation of society, and both insist that in order to constitute a lawful marriage there must be, not only an agreement between the parties, but a *ceremony*, the essence of which is a verbal contract in the presence of at least one witness. No

two persons are regarded as lawfully married simply because they have agreed to live together as man and wife, nor is there a church in Christendom, to whose communion persons sustaining such a relation to each other would be admitted. But where is the express Scripture warrant for this requirement? There is not a specific text, nor a recorded instance in the whole Bible to sustain it. No form of ceremony is prescribed, no example of the performance of such a ceremony is reported, there is not in all Scripture an explicit declaration that any ceremony whatever is necessary. Will the opponents of the Baptism of Infants carry out their favorite method of reasoning to its logical conclusion, and insist that, because the Scriptures are silent upon the subject, marriage ceremonies are unscriptural and wrong, and ministers exercise usurped prerogatives in performing them?

All Christians who observe the Lord's Supper agree that it is to be administered to all who make a credible profession of Christ's name and join themselves to his people. But where is there a single passage of Scripture which says that *women* are to be admitted to the Lord's table? Where is the passage in the New Testament which expressly declares that any women ever did participate in the communion in the days of the apostles? It cannot be found. Will the opponents of the Baptism of Infants be consistent with themselves and make the silence of the Scripture a plea in bar against the admission of women to the Lord's Supper? They will doubtless answer that women are redeemed by Christ, they are capable of salvation, they have the qualifications for communion, and having received the benefits signified and sealed by this Sacrament, they are entitled also to the outward sign and seal. All of which is equally true of the right of infants to baptism. If the silence of Scripture does not exclude women from the one Sacrament, neither does it exclude infants from the other; even if the silence were the same in both cases, which we are very far from admitting.

Most Christians rejoice to believe that infants, dying in infancy, are saved through the mercy of God in Christ, notwithstanding they are incapable of exercising and confessing faith in Christ, which is the only expressed condition of salvation. But where is the text which says this in so many words? It is an inference which we accept as fully warranted by Scripture. But where is the explicit statement of this doctrine? An "able minister of the letter which killeth" (2 Cor. iii. 6), can easily construct a Scripture argument to prove that no infant can be saved; he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: no infant can *believe* and be baptized; therefore no infant can be

saved. But "the Spirit which maketh alive" recognizes that Christ in the words quoted does not lay down the exclusive condition of salvation for all mankind, but only for those who are capable of hearing and believing; and infers from his silence—a silence which is broken, however, by many still small voices, and from the knowledge of his character and mission—that there is salvation also for those who are incapable of believing. The fact is that no Christian, Roman Catholic or Protestant, restricts his faith or practice by that which is expressly set down in Scripture. It is not the orthodox doctrine that the Scriptures record in words all things necessary for God's glory and man's salvation. The catholic truth on this point is clearly stated in the Westminster Confession of Faith (Chap. I, Sec. 6): "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for his own glory and man's salvation, faith and life, is *either* expressly set down in Scripture, *or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced therefrom.*" The Scripture warrant for the Baptism of Infants is not so much direct as it is inferential. But it is not the less strong on that account.

The foundation of inferential proof as deduced from Scripture is the perpetual harmony of sacred things; so that one who has thoroughly and rightly considered a single doctrine may hence easily deduce many others which depend upon it, as they are linked together in one continued chain.*

We have a splendid example and warrant for such deduction in Matthew xxii. 23, where the Saviour infers the continued existence of the soul and the resurrection of the body from the Old Testament declaration that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The whole system of Christian theology is constructed upon the principle that "circumstances cannot lie." The circumstantial proofs of the Deity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity are infinitely stronger than the direct proofs. The Scripture warrant for the Baptism of Infants is not only inferential, but it is cumulative. It underlies a multitude of facts; it is involved in exceeding great and precious promises, which are still moving on to their fulfilment; it is circumstantial to doctrines which are fundamental to the whole system of revealed truth; it is rooted in the gospel which was "preached aforetime to Abraham," and in the whole structure and design of Apostolic Christianity, by which "the blessing of Abraham has come upon the Gentiles through Jesus Christ" (Gal. iii. 8, 14); it rests not upon any one part of the Bible, but upon the Bible taken as a whole; it is in the very *warp* of the Scriptures.

* Horne's "Introduction," vol. ii., p. 561.

III. The whole controversy concerning the baptism of infants hinges upon the more profound question of THE PERPETUITY AND IDENTITY OF THE CHURCH as a divine institution in the world. No one who admits the existence of the church under the Old Testament will deny that by express divine commandment infants were treated as joint members of it with their parents. And, therefore, if the church now is the same body that it was then, being not merely its successor, but its development and perpetuation, it consists now as it did then of "all who profess the true religion, together with their children," and it follows by a necessary inference, which no candid mind will deny, that the children are entitled to baptism in recognition of their birthright. Our opponents insist that the Old Testament church was utterly abolished, and that the church as it now exists was founded as an entirely new institution by the Saviour and his apostles. This theory—for it is only a theory utterly unsupported by the recorded facts of the gospel history—is terribly consistent with itself. It sweeps away not only the church-membership of infants—so far as it rests upon the testimony of the Old Testament Scriptures—but it sweeps away the Old Testament Scriptures themselves out of the rule of faith and out of the charter of the Christian Church. Aside altogether from its bearing upon the church-membership and the baptism of infants, we should reject it as contrary to fact and destructive of all right principles in the interpretation of Scripture. We hold that the church of God is one and the same in all ages, being built upon the foundation of the prophets as well as of the apostles. God did not begin to build under the Old Testament dispensation and then throw the work away unfinished and begin over again under the New. Judaism and Christianity are not different, still less are they hostile religions. Their revelations differ only as the morning twilight differs from the full-blown day. There is an organic and vital connection between the Old and the New Testament Scriptures; and as they constitute in their oneness the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever, so the people of God under both dispensations constitute one and the same church.

The proof of this lies on the very surface of the Scriptures. The Titles of the church run through and through the whole sacred history, and are used in the same sense by prophets and by the apostles of our Lord. The Hebrew words קהל and עדת in the Old Testament correspond exactly to the ἐκκλησία of the New Testament. The *Church* of God is the *Kingdom* of God. The terms are used interchangeably by Christ and his apostles. In his parables the Saviour constantly speaks of the "Kingdom of God," in such con-

nections and under such imagery as to show that he is describing an external and visible organization; the very same kingdom which is described in such glowing terms by Isaiah, and to which such precious promises of perpetuity and glory are made by all the prophets. This church or kingdom is not a series of scattered and isolated democracies, but one visible organization under a royal and divine dominion. Its membership, even under the Old Testament dispensation, was not confined to the natural descendants of Abraham. Any Gentile might join it by complying with certain prescribed conditions. Hence at the day of Pentecost "there were dwelling at Jerusalem devout men *out of every nation under heaven both Jews and proselytes*" (Acts ii. 5, 10). And while the converts to Christianity continued with one accord in the temple, claiming their privileges and performing their duties as defined under the old dispensation, and without any consciousness of being separated from the church of their fathers, "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." To *what* church? To the church of God as it had existed under the Old Economy, which was now passing through a transition period into the clearer light and more perfect development of the new dispensation. "The abolition of those restrictions which were suited to a preparatory state fitted her for universality, but that which fitted her for universality could in no sense whatever be her annihilation. The Jews were not cut off till after the Gentiles were taken in, and the excision of the Jews was no more the extermination of the visible church than the lopping off of the diseased branches is the felling of the tree." *

Not only the titles, but the mission and functions of the church are the same under both dispensations and could be fulfilled only by her perpetuity. "She is the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. iii. 15). To her are committed the oracles of God. If the New Testament church is not the development and perpetuation of the Old Testament church, then the Old Testament Scriptures are not committed to her, and are no part of her rule of faith and practice, and the whole Scriptures have never been committed to any church for their preservation and exposition.

Moreover, the promises made to the visible church and kingdom of God, many of which are yet unfulfilled, necessarily involve her perpetuity and identity. Take for example the words of Isaiah lx. 3-5: "The Gentiles shall come to thy light and kings to the brightness of thy rising; the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto

* Mason's Essays on the Church of God. Works, vol. ii., 276.

thee; the forces of the Gentiles shall be converted unto thee." These and similar promises were made, not to the Jews as a nation—not to the Jewish commonwealth, not to the church under the Mosaic dispensation—but they were made to the church of God, embodied and covered under these temporal conditions, as the oak tree is covered in the acorn. Christ himself gives us the summary of all these Old Testament promises to the church when he tells us "they shall come from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God."

The whole history of the New Dispensation shows that the church is one and the same. It came into its new and wider form noiselessly, as the twilight broadens into the day. Christ himself was circumcised and received the baptism of John, and "fulfilled all righteousness" as a birthright member of the kingdom of God under the old economy. And while he was still a regular attendant upon the temple and an observer of the Feasts, he said, "tell it to the church," as a rule of discipline for all time. He ate the passover the same night in which he instituted the Lord's Supper, thus showing the identity of the two sacraments which Paul recognizes when he says, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; let us keep the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. v. 7). Though the veil of the temple was rent in twain when Jesus cried, "It is finished," the sacrifices of the temple and the intercession of the holy place did not cease till twenty years after. Christianity appeared to both Jew and Gentile, and achieved its earliest and most signal triumph under the aspect of a new development of the same old religion. The gospel was first proclaimed in the synagogues, and appealed for its vindication to the Old Testament Scriptures. The great apostle of the Gentiles did not deny, but constantly insisted upon this vital connection between the Old and the New. It was no cowardice nor worldly policy which led him to circumcise Timothy (Acts xvi. 3), but he did it "because of the Jews," to show them that the faith which was in Timothy was the same faith which was in his mother Lois and his grandmother Eunice.

Before Agrippa and the assembled Romans he declared, "I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers" (Acts xxvi. 6). Looking back upon the days of his blind zeal, he says, "I persecuted the church of God" (1 Cor. xv. 9). Appealing to the Jews, who rejected the gospel and prided themselves on adhering to the law, he says, "We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus" (Phil. iii. 3). In the

11th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, the apostle compares the church of God to the olive tree, from which some of the natural branches (the Jews) were broken off, and into which the wild olive tree (the Gentiles) were grafted. But he cautions the Gentile Christians against being puffed up by the mercy which had been shown to them. "And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree, boast not against the branches; thou bearest not the root, but the root thee." The tree remains the same though the branches are changed, and the root and fatness of it support and nourish those who are grafted into it. "The ancient theocracy is merged in the kingdom of Christ. The latter is but an enlargement and elevation of the former. The church of God is the same in all ages and under all dispensations. It is the society of the true people of God, together with their children. The olive tree is one, though the branches are numerous and sometimes changed."*

It follows from the perpetuity and identity of the church that whatever privileges were granted and whatever promises were made to her under the old dispensation, remain in full force until they are either explicitly repealed or exhaustively fulfilled.

IV. The promises and privileges given to her and constituting her endowment and inheritance in all ages are summed up in THE COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM, WHICH IS THE PERPETUAL CHARTER OF THE CHURCH.

The idea of a covenant between God and men, whether in the broad sense of a divine arrangement or in the more specific sense of a promise suspended upon a condition, is one of the seed thoughts of the Bible. The Creator and Preserver of mankind has established a definite order in his works both of creation and of providence, and has been pleased to reveal that order to men and to pledge himself to its execution by specific engagements. Such was the covenant made with Noah as the representative of the whole human race, concerning day and night, seed-time and harvest, of which the rainbow is the appointed sign and seal. Abraham stands in the same relation to the redeemed, that Noah sustains to the whole human race; and the covenant with Abraham is the revelation and the promise of redemption, just as the covenant with Noah was the revelation of the divine purpose and plan of providence over the world. To regard Abraham as a Jew or as one of the children of Israel is to misapprehend his relation to the people of God in all ages, and to miss the true scope and

* Dr. Hodge, "Commentary on Romans," xi., 17-24.

meaning of the promises which were made to him as the father of all the faithful. He was a Gentile, called out from the world and made the covenant head of the holy catholic church. The original promise concerning the seed of the woman was localized in his family, and afterward in the family of Jacob in preference to that of Esau, and still further restricted to the tribe of Judah, the father of the Jews, and still further to the house and lineage of David, the theocratic representative of the Messiah; but all these restrictions were outward and temporary; they did not abrogate the original promise, nor restrict the universality of its meaning. Abraham and Israel and Judah and David, with all they specifically represented, were but trustees to whom the keeping of the promise was committed until in the fulness of time the glory of Israel should become a light to lighten the Gentiles. The views are not peculiar to the Old Didactic Theology. Biblical Theology embodying the best results of modern criticism fully confirms them. OEHLER, in his admirable work on the theology of the Old Testament, says: "The older theology certainly erred when it sought to find in Gen. iii. 15 the Messiah, the great destroyer of the serpent, directly promised; but it did not err in the general conception of the thought of the passage. The whole course of the development of salvation is here exhibited in its germ; this is the seed corn from which the whole history of salvation has grown" (p. 54). "It is only in the idea of *the people of God* that the key is given to the Old Testament history, which would otherwise be an insoluble riddle" (p. 58). "An everlasting people is founded in Abraham's descendants, as the bearer of revelation, which forms a contrast to the mass of the nations, and yet in such a way that the obliteration of the contrast is kept in view. From the first origin of the race of Revelation, the Old Testament is careful to distinguish between a race of Revelation *πατὰ σάρκα* and a race of Revelation *κατὰ πνεῦμα*" (p. 62).

The Abrahamic covenant in its universality and permanence must be carefully distinguished from several specific arrangements and promises suspended upon conditions, which were subordinate to it, and intended to adapt it to temporary circumstances. Especially it must be distinguished from the national covenant made at Mount Sinai with the children of Israel and the mixed multitude who constituted "the church in the wilderness" (Acts. vii. 38). This Sinaitic covenant embracing the Law—in the ordinances of the Levitical code, and in the specific enforcement of the ten commandments,—was superseded and done away with by the bringing in of "the better covenant established upon better promises" (Heb. viii., 6, 9). But this better

covenant was new only in respect to that which it superseded. In itself it was the fulfilment of the same old promise, which the law, including all that was peculiar to the Sinaitic covenant, could not disannul (Gal. iii. 17). The tuition of the law which came by Moses reached its goal in the grace and truth which came by Jesus Christ; but that grace and truth was promised and revealed in the gospel which was preached aforetime to Abraham. The light of that gospel preceded, interpenetrated, followed, and will finally swallow up the darkness of Sinai. The covenant of grace is older and more comprehensive than the covenant of works. The law was ordained by angels in the hand of a Mediator. Its shadows of good things to come were made by the eternal brightness behind them. The covenant with Abraham, which was made four hundred years before the giving of the law on Sinai, is the fullest and most permanent embodiment and publication of the covenant of grace. This is evident from its express terms, whether we consider its duration, its subjects, or its substance.

(1.) It is an EVERLASTING COVENANT. "I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee for an everlasting covenant" (Gen. xvii. 7).

Nor is the perpetuity of the covenant thus expressly declared, restricted by the promise which immediately follows that *the land of Canaan* should be given to Abraham and to his seed for an *everlasting possession*.*

While we hold to the broader and more spiritual view of the everlasting possession as most consistent with the language of the promise, taken in its connections and with the inspired interpretation of it given by the apostle to the Gentiles,† it is not necessary for the pur-

* Some commentators take the word everlasting as applied to the possession of the land, in an accommodated sense, to signify its possession during the continuance of the Mosaic dispensation. But we cannot bring our mind to accept this interpretation. Besides seeming forced and unnatural, it does not appear to be sustained by the facts. The children of Israel did not have the land of Canaan for an everlasting or continuous possession even from the days of Moses to the coming of Christ. The only period during which they were in undisputed possession was the reign of David and Solomon, and surely that cannot be fairly considered an everlasting possession even in the accommodated sense of the word. We are shut up to the conclusion that the unfulfilled promise is yet to be made good in one of two ways: (1) by the actual return and permanent settlement of Abraham's natural descendants in the land wherein he was a stranger and pilgrim, or, (2) by the final ingathering of the whole church of God, which is the spiritual seed of Abraham, into that heavenly and better country for which the patriarchs longed even while they dwelt in the earthly Canaan (Heb. xi. 9-16).

† "Now, if the whole land of Canaan was promised to this posterity, which was to increase into a multitude of nations, it is perfectly evident that the sum and substance of the promise was not exhausted by the gift of the land whose boundaries are described in Gen. xv. 18-21, as a possession to the nation of Israel; but that the extension of the idea of the lineal posterity, 'Israel after the flesh' to the spiritual posterity 'Israel after the Spirit,' requires the expansion of the idea and extent of the Earthly Canaan, whose boundaries reach as widely as the multitude of nations having Abraham as Father; and therefore Abraham received the promise that he should be 'heir of the world'" (Rom. iv. 13).—Delitzsch on Pentateuch, vol. i., p. 225.

poses of this essay that we insist upon it. All we contend for is that the covenant with Abraham is *everlasting in its duration*; and this feature of it will not be changed, but rather confirmed by the admission that it includes in its provisions the final and perpetual settlement of the Jews in the land of Canaan.

(2.) As to its SUBJECTS, the Abrahamic covenant INCLUDES ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH. It was not made with Abraham as the progenitor of the Jews, but as "the father of many nations," and this is further explained by the declaration, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." This brings the Abrahamic covenant into line with all the previous revelations of the covenant of grace. The seed of Abraham is synonymous and identical with the "seed of the woman," in the specific application of the expression, to the "one seed which is Christ" (Gal. iii. 19), and in its broader application to all Christ's redeemed people in every age and land. In the first human pair God created all men in his own image. From the creation to Abraham the whole human race is the object of his guidance and government. In the ninth chapter of Genesis the blessing is pronounced on all the posterity of Noah. How could a God, who for centuries had embraced the whole, suddenly limit himself to a single race and people, unless this limitation be destined to serve as a means of future expansion?*

Abraham never was and never can be the father of many nations in any lineal and literal sense. His natural seed never was and is not now as the stars of heaven and as the dust of the earth for number. The children of Israel, with the Edomites and Ishmaelites added, never numbered a hundredth part of the population of the earth. To restrict these covenant promises to his natural posterity is to deny the literal meaning of the words as well as their interior sense as explained in other scriptures, and to array the promises of God against the plainest facts of history and observation. Besides, if we look at the terms of the covenant, we will see that Ishmael and the sons of Keturah were expressly excluded from the process by which the seed of Abraham was to become innumerable. He was to become a multitude of nations through Sarah and the son of his old age; and the promise, so far as its fulfilment was to be accomplished through his natural descendants, was still further restricted in the family of Isaac by the exclusion of Esau; so that if Abraham is to become the father of many nations, according to the terms of the covenant, it must be through Jacob. But the twelve sons of Jacob and their descendants constituted only one nation, with whom God entered into

* Hengstenberg's "History of the Kingdom of God under the Old Testament," vol. i., p. 126.

the legal and national covenant of Sinai. Was the law against the promises of God? Did that legal and national covenant with the Israelites do away with the better covenant established upon better promises, made with Abraham four hundred years before? By no means. These successive restrictions were designed to keep alive the promise during the age of preparation and to secure its ultimate expansion in the fulness of time. In Christ, the Son of Man, and the Son of God, the spiritual posterity of Abraham embraces all nations; Abraham is "the father of all who believe" and "the heir of the world" (Rom. iv. 11, 13).

(3.) It is evident, not only from the perpetuity and universality of the Abrahamic covenant, but also from the SUBSTANCE of its promises, that it was a covenant of grace and salvation. It was the gospel in its germ. Its central promise and innermost meaning was salvation through Christ. It summed up and provided for the fulfilment of all the gracious intimations of redemption which had been given to man since the fall, and from it, as from a divine seed, all subsequent revelations of grace and truth are unfolded. From the beginning it opened the door for the admission of all nations to the fellowship of God and his people. Its holy sign and seal were by divine command applied not only to Abraham and his children, but to all who were in his house, to the stranger and *his* children. And this door was kept open and carefully guarded under the Sinaitic covenant. Not only the lineal descendants of Abraham, but proselytes from every land, might come with their children into fellowship with the God of Israel, who was even then declared to be the God of the whole earth.*

Paul's exposition of the Abrahamic covenant, in the Epistles to the Romans, the Galatians, and the Hebrews, demonstrates conclusively that it is a revelation of the covenant of grace and identical with the gospel. He repudiates and resents the imputation that he is advocating a new religion, or setting up a new church, or proclaiming the fulfilment of any other promises than those "unto which are twelve tribes instantly serving God day and night hope to come" (Acts xxvi. 17). He affirms that "the gospel was preached aforetime unto Abraham," and that the covenant with him "was confirmed before of God *in Christ*" (Gal. iii. 8, 17); that "Christ is the *minister of the circumcision* for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto

* The exclusiveness of the Jews in the later periods of their national history, grew not out of the sacred trust committed to them for the benefit of mankind, but out of their own political pride whereby they perverted that trust and made void the law of God by their traditions.

the fathers" (Rom. xv. 8); that "he has redeemed us from the curse of the law that *the blessing of Abraham* might come upon the Gentiles" (Gal. iii. 13, 14); that he is "the mediator of a better covenant"—(better than the legal and national covenant instituted at Sinai)—"which was established upon better promises," *i. e.*, upon the promises made to Abraham (Heb. ix. 6); that the literal are not the true children of Abraham according to the terms of the covenant, "for he is not a Jew who is one outwardly," "neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children, but the children of promise are counted for the seed," "for the promise that he should be heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith" (Rom. ii. 28, ix. 7, iv. 13). "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. iii. 29).

Now these three grand features of the Abrahamic covenant, its everlastingness, its universality, and its graciousness, demonstrate that every promise made to the father of the faithful, and every principle which entered into the organization of the church in his house, holds good and is in full force at the present day; that the relation established between Jehovah and the true children of Abraham "to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee" can never be dissolved; that the Abrahamic covenant is the perpetual charter of the church.

V. The covenant with Abraham includes as its most essential and distinctive feature on its human side, THE CHURCH-MEMBERSHIP OF INFANTS. Its foundations are laid in the family relation. The seed of the woman is the germ of the church, and the parental instinct, under the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, is the great human force by which the church is to be developed and perpetuated in the world. The gracious promise, "I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth and as the stars of heaven for multitude," is conditioned upon the natural precept, "be faithful and multiply and replenish the earth."

"Whatever hypocrites austere talk,
Defaming as unpure what God declares
Pure, and commands to some leaves free to all—
Our Maker bids increase; who bids abstain,
But our destroyer, foe to God and man."*

"Lo children are an heritage of the Lord." They are included in every covenant he has made with men. The most excellent of all the exceeding great and precious promises is, "I will be a God to thee

* Milton's "Paradise Lost," Book IV., 744.

and to thy seed after thee." And to show that this promise pertains to the seed of believers from their birth, the sign and seal of the covenant under the Old Testament dispensation was fixed by divine command upon both the natural and adopted children of Abraham in their infancy, that God's "Covenant might be in their flesh for an everlasting covenant." They were circumcised, not to bring them into the church, but because they were born into the church by virtue of the covenant relation of their parents to God. Otherwise there is no force nor meaning in the threatening, "The uncircumcised man-child shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant" (Gen. xvii. 14). How could he be *cut off*, if he were not already in organic and vital connection with God's people? How could he *break* God's covenant if he were not born an heir to its privileges and a subject to its obligations? No one who admits that there was any church of God under the Old Testament Dispensation will deny that the infant children of all who belonged to it, whether Jews or proselytes, were recognized and treated as birthright members. It was just this that constituted the difference and the advance in the revelation of grace which was made to Abraham beyond what was made to the patriarchs before him. It was just this that marked a new era in the progressive history of redemption. It was just this that emphasized and gave a permanent significance to Abraham's calling out of the world, and made him and his house the germ of the church which is to exist throughout all ages till the plan and work of redemption are complete in the glory of the church triumphant. God had believing people and worshippers in the world before Abraham, but no organized and visible church. And broad and deep at the foundation of that church is laid the great principle that the family is its unit, and that the children of believers are included in the covenant with their parents as birthright members of that church. One would think the fact that every man-child born of Israelitish parents and of every proselyte who came to "trust under the wings of the Lord God of Israel" was by express divine command circumcised, and bore the record of God's covenant in his flesh, and the crowning fact that Jesus Christ, the Son of man, was thus circumcised in his infancy, would restrain the ridicule and denunciation in which some indulge against the alleged folly of baptizing an unconscious infant who knows not its right hand from its left. Is it objected that circumcision, as a physical fact, is not peculiar to the Israelites and their proselytes, but has been practiced by many nations from time immemorial? We answer that there were rainbows before the days of Noah, when God set his bow in the clouds as the seal of his covenant concerning seed-time and

harvest ; and there were bread and wine in the common use of mankind before Christ made them the sacramental symbols of his body and blood. Is it objected that under the Old Testament dispensation all the children of believers did not receive the seal of the covenant, because only the male child was circumcised? The cavil is almost too petty and too far aside from the argument to notice ; but it may be well to answer that the female was represented and included in the male, for the "head of the woman is the man, and the head of every man is Christ" (1 Cor. xi. 3).

The doing away with circumcision as the outward sign, did not destroy or alter the thing which it signified. The sign was not abolished, but merged into another, simpler and more universal in its application, and better adapted to the enlargement of the church ; just as the Sabbath under the Jewish form of its observance was merged into the Christian Sabbath, and as the Passover was merged into the Lord's Supper. The sacraments of the Old Testament foretold Christ, the sacraments of the New announce and commemorate him. "We have now no need of that circumcision which is outward in the flesh, as we have all the blessed fruits of Christ's death and resurrection more clearly and at the same time more extensively represented and sealed in Baptism, which is dispensed equally to both sexes." *

VI. As the Abrahamic covenant in its graciousness and universality is an everlasting covenant, and as the church under the New Testament is identical with the church under the Old Testament, so also BAPTISM IS IDENTICAL WITH CIRCUMCISION. It is the seal of the same covenant ; it recognizes and confirms the same relation to God ; it is expressly declared in Scripture to mean the same thing, and therefore, by good and necessary consequence, it is to be applied to the same subjects.

The everlasting promise is : "I will be a God to you, and to your seed after you."

To what other promise does Peter point, on the day of Pentecost, when he says : "*The* promise is to you and to your children" (Acts ii. 38). And what is his design in this reference but to assure the Jews and proselytes, whom he is addressing, that by joining the fellowship of Christ's disciples they would not forfeit any of the blessings covenanted to Abraham, and to his seed? He enforces upon the adults, to whom he is speaking, the exhortation to repent and be baptized, by the powerful motive that their children would have a

* Fisher's Catechism, 195.

right and title to the same covenant promises, the seal of which they would themselves receive in their baptism.

Circumcision and baptism are identical in their symbolic meaning. They both signify the inward and spiritual grace of regeneration. "And the Lord thy God will *circumcise thy heart*, and the heart of thy seed" (Deut. xxx. 6). "For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart in the spirit, and not in the letter" (Rom. ii. 28). "In like manner," says Calvin, "may we in the present day refute the vanity of those who in baptism seek nothing but water. That man trifles, or rather is delirious, who would stop short at the element of water, and the external observance, and not allow his mind to rise to the spiritual mystery."*

What that spiritual mystery is, Paul explicitly declares in Col. ii. 11: "We are circumcised with the circumcision *made without hands*, the putting off of the body of sins of the flesh by the *circumcision of Christ*, being buried with him *in baptism*." And again, he affirms that baptism is the seal of the Abrahamic covenant (in Gal. iii. 27, 29). "For as many as have been baptized into Christ are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise."

Now, if baptism is *the circumcision of Christ* and *the seal of the Abrahamic covenant*, if it signifies the same thing, and seals the same promises under the new dispensation that circumcision did under the old, it follows irresistibly, in the absence of any express restriction to the contrary, that it is to be applied to the same classes of persons, and upon the same conditions, that is, to adult proselytes who profess their faith, and to the children of believers. The only change is in the outward form of the ordinance; its signification and its subjects are left unchanged. If the State of New York by act of Legislature, or in a constitutional convention of the people, should alter the form of its seal, saying nothing about the uses to which it should hereafter be applied, that would neither invalidate any document which has been ratified by the old seal, nor prevent the new one from being applied to similar State papers in the future. The argument for the baptism of infants is thus put into a nutshell. Infants were circumcised under the old dispensation; circumcision signifies and seals the same thing with baptism; therefore infants are to be baptized. We retort upon those who demand a more explicit Scripture warrant, in so many words, for the baptism of infants, by demanding

* Calvin's "Institutes," Book 4, xvi. 14.

of them an explicit warrant for excluding them from the ordinance. The burden of proof lies on them, not on us. The covenant made with Abraham still stands, and is enlarged, in fact, according to its original design and promise, so as to include "those which were afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." "Though it be but a man's covenant, yet, if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth or addeth thereto" (Gal. iii. 15). And the most explicit condition upon which the blessings promised in this covenant are suspended, is the command that every child of believing parents, whether of the natural or the adopted seed of Abraham, shall receive the appointed sign and seal. Now, show us the chapter and verse of the New Testament where Christ, or one of his apostles, has declared or intimated that infants are no longer to be regarded and treated as members of the church of God, heirs of the covenant promises, and recipients of its appointed seal.

"A spiritual privilege, once granted by God unto any, cannot be changed, disannulled, or abrogated without an especial divine revocation of it, or the substitution of a greater privilege and mercy in its room. And to say that a privilege so granted may be revoked even by God himself, without the substitution of a greater privilege and mercy in the room of it, is contrary to the goodness of God, his love and care for the church, and his constant course of proceeding with it from the foundation of the world, wherein he went on in the enlargement and increase of its privileges unto the coming of Christ. They who deny the right of the infant seed of believers to a participation of the covenant and the initial seal of it, which was granted to the infant seed of Abraham, cannot produce any revocation of it by God himself, nor any greater mercy and privilege granted unto them in its room, which they do not once pretend unto, but leave the seed of believers, while in their infant state, in the same condition as those of Pagans and Infidels, expressly contrary to God's covenant" John Owen's Works, vol. xvi., p. 259).

VII. Now in the light of these scriptural facts and principles we interpret THE SAVIOUR'S GREAT COMMISSION. He was "a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God to confirm the promises made unto the fathers" (Rom. xv. 8). "He hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles" (Gal. iii. 13, 14). When after his sacrificial death and triumphant resurrection, he said to his disciples, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe whatsoever I have commanded you"; he did not repudiate his character and mission to the seed of Abraham, nor annul the covenant relation between God and his people, but only announced the predestined and promised enlargement of its scope as including all nations; he did not abolish the seal of the covenant, but only changed its outward form into a simpler and less painful ceremony; and above all, he did not restrict the subjects to whom that seal should be applied, but

only declared in explicit terms, that the enlargement which had been prefigured in the old law of proselytism, was now complete. One of the most important rules in the interpretation of any Scripture precept is to put ourselves in the place of those to whom it was originally addressed; and this is especially necessary when the precept in question is to be applied by us to the interpretation of their conduct in obedience to it. Its meaning is not to be determined by the words alone, but by the circumstances in which they were spoken, by the state of mind to which they were addressed, and by all the preceding history whereby the understanding of them would be influenced. This rule is always observed in the interpretation of human law. A new statute is interpreted in the light of the old. Whatever of the old is not repealed, either expressly or by necessary implication, stands in all its original force. And when after the lapse of years, doubts arise as to these implications, the solution is sought for in the question how they who were first required to obey the law would naturally understand it. There is no difficulty in applying these simple rules to the interpretation of the great commission. They to whom it was addressed were Jews, members of the church under the old dispensation, and fully imbued with its spirit. The idea of the church-membership of infants, and the application of the seal of the covenant to them, were as familiar to the minds of the apostles as the idea of God's existence. They could not possibly infer from anything Christ had commanded or taught that this fundamental principle was to be repealed. Certainly nothing in the great commission gives the least intimation of such a change. Nor is there any intimation that such a change was in fact accomplished, in all the subsequent discussions between the apostle of the Gentiles and the Jewish converts who were still zealous for the law of Moses. The great commission is unfortunately translated in the received version of the New Testament. Why *Μαθητεύω* should be regarded as synonymous with *Διδάσκω* and both be rendered *teach*, is hard to imagine.

The revised version makes a great improvement when it says, "Go *make disciples* of all nations." But it would be still more accurately in accordance with what the apostles would understand by the word, to say "Go *proselyte* all nations." The emphasis of the command was on "*all nations*." Henceforth they were not to confine their proselyting labors, as they had hitherto done, to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Their new field was the world. Now suppose the command had been "go disciple or proselyte all nations, *circumcising* them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"; would there have been the least doubt in their minds as to

whether the children of believing parents ought to receive the seal of the covenant? Certainly not. No candid man will maintain that they would have hesitated a moment as to the right of children to be circumcised upon the ground of their parents' professed faith. Their lifelong training and their whole habits of mind would have led them to take for granted that the children were to be included with their parents just as they always had been. In the absence of all instruction to the contrary, why should they not, for the same reasons, include children with those whom they were commanded to baptize? What possible reason can be assigned for excluding them from baptism, which will not apply with equal force as an argument against their circumcision? And so, on the other hand, what argument could have been used in favor of the *circumcision* of children, in case that word had been used in the great commission, which did not then and does not now apply in favor of the baptism of children? The enlargement of the field in which the apostles were to perform their proselyting labors, and the alteration in the outward form of the sign to be applied to those who were proselyted—could not suggest, much less require any change in the subjects to whom, or the conditions upon which that sign was to be applied. This would hold good even if baptism, whether of adults or of infants, were an entirely new thing, a ceremony invented by Christ, and first announced to the apostles in the great commission. But the fact is, that while Christ instituted baptism as a sacrament of the New Testament, the use of water in religious ceremonies as a symbol of purification was common to many nations, and was as familiar to the Jews as the eating of bread and the drinking of wine, which the Saviour consecrated into the symbols of his body and blood.

The learned Dr. Lightfoot has demonstrated that it was the universal custom of the Jews in Christ's day, and for ages before, not only to circumcise but also to baptize the infant children of heathens brought as proselytes into the Jewish church. Our space will not permit us to detail the historic proofs of this position, neither can we discuss the question whether the practice of the Jews in this use of baptism was according to Scripture. On this point it will be enough to observe that they claimed to have scriptural warrant for it. The Jewish commentators insist that at the time when their forefathers renewed the covenant with God at Sinai, they were all washed or baptized by divine command (Ex. xix. 10), that their infant children were included in the covenant and in this ceremonial washing; and that the command in Numbers xv. 15, "One ordinance shall be for you of the congregation and for the stranger that sojourn-

eth among you," bound them to perform the like ceremonies for the infants of all proselytes who came, like Ruth, to trust under the wings of the Lord God of Israel. Even admitting that their interpretation was forced and incorrect, the fact remains that they made such interpretations and practiced accordingly. This practice continued and was prevalent in the days of Christ. Baptism as a religious rite was common and familiar to all the Jews of that time. They expressed no surprise when John baptized, as though he were introducing a ceremony hitherto unknown. They only questioned his authority to administer a rite whose significance was well understood. "Why baptizest thou then, if thou be not that Christ nor Elias, neither that prophet?"

The bearing of these facts on the meaning of the great commission, and especially upon the question whether the infants of believers were included among those whom the apostles were commanded to baptize, is obvious. Dr. Lightfoot sums up the argument in the following simple but weighty words:

"Hence, also, the reason appears why the New Testament does not prescribe by some more accurate rule who the persons are to be baptized. The Anabaptists object, 'it is not commanded to baptize infants'; to whom I answer, it is not forbidden to baptize infants, therefore they are to be baptized. And the reason is plain. For when Pedobaptism in the Jewish church was so well known, usual, and frequent in the admission of proselytes, there was no need to strengthen it by any precept when baptism was now passed into an evangelical sacrament. For Christ took baptism into his hands and into evangelical use as he found it, this only added that he might promote it to a worthier end and to a larger use. The whole nation knew well enough that little children used to be baptized, and there was no need of a precept for that which had ever by common use prevailed. On the other hand there *was need of a plain and open prohibition* against the baptism of infants if our Saviour would not have them baptized. For since it was most common in foregoing ages, if Christ had been minded to have that custom abolished he would have openly forbidden it. Therefore, his silence and the silence of the Scripture on this matter confirms Pedobaptism, and continueth it to all ages" (Lightfoot's Works, vol. ii., p. 59).

VIII. The recorded fact that THE APOSTLES BAPTIZED HOUSEHOLDS, in immediate connection with the professed faith of one or both the parents, ought to be interpreted in the light of the facts and principles we have just applied to interpretation of the great commission. It is easy to *say* that there were no children in the families of Cornelius, of Lydia, of the Philippian Jailor, and of Stephanus; and it is no less easy to assert that these four are the only instances in which households, as such, were baptized by an apostle. But without impeaching the sincerity of those who make these assertions, we venture to say that they never would have been made except under the stress of necessity to sustain a foregone conclusion. The thing to be proved is assumed in the premises. Infants are not to be bap-

tized, therefore the apostles baptized no more than four households, and in them there were no infants. In the absence of explicit statements the decision of both questions must turn upon the balance of probability. Since we know that Peter and Paul baptized four households, and since there is nothing whatever in the record of these cases to indicate that they were exceptional, and since the baptism of households is in full accord with the principles of the Abrahamic covenant, the precepts of the Mosaic law, and the practice of the Jews in the treatment of proselytes, and since none of these principles, precepts, or practices were repealed or reprobated by Christ, the strong probability, amounting to a moral certainty, is that Paul and all the apostles were in the habit of baptizing households upon the professed faith of parents.

And so also, we think, there is a probability, amounting to a moral certainty, that there were children in the households whose baptism is recorded. The natural probability in the case is confirmed by the form of the record. Why should these households be lumped together, instead of recording the names of the individuals baptized? Paul declares that at Corinth he had "baptized Crispus and Gaius and the *household* of Stephanus" (1 Cor. i. 14-16). Now if that household consisted exclusively of adults, why not give *their* names as well as the names of Crispus and Gaius? If each one of them was a believer, having a personal standing in the church, not through the household covenant, but by virtue of a personal profession of faith and a personal relation to Christ, what could justify the apostle in ignoring their individuality and embracing them all under the head of Stephanus? It seems to be a moral certainty that the members of that household were children under age, for whom the father stood as the federal head.

The form of the record in the case of the Philippian Jailor greatly strengthens this opinion. To the question, What must I do to be saved? Paul answers, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house." This certainly establishes a *connection* between the Jailor's faith and the salvation of his house. The one *in some sense* secures the other, whatever secondary means may be employed to realize that security. To make the apostle's words mean nothing more than the truism that the same terms of salvation were offered to the Jailor and to the adult members of his family, is to put a platitude into his mouth utterly foreign to his use of language. He might as well have said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, *and the Roman Emperor.*" The connection between the faith of the father and the salvation of his house

is real and influential; it is something more than the common conditions upon which he and other men might obtain salvation. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and *thy house shall be saved.*" This seems to us to be the plain meaning of the words. Nor is this connection nullified by the recorded fact that the apostle "spake the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house." The validity of God's promises does not depend upon our ability to understand them. He speaks to his children, as we do to ours, many things which are as yet beyond their comprehension. Neither, again, is the connection explained by the power of the father's example, for that example had no time to exert an intelligent influence upon the household previous to their baptism—"he was baptized, he and all his straightway." The whole record, when regarded simply as an account of the conversion and baptism of a company of adults, is strange and incongruous. But how plain and consistent with itself and with other Scriptures it becomes, when we read between the lines the everlasting principles of the Abrahamic covenant, of which baptism is the seal.

IX. THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST IN ITS RELATION TO INFANCY is a theme upon which the Scriptures say little, but suggest much. Is there no connection between his coming in the flesh and the salvation of that vast multitude, probably the majority of the human race, who die before they are capable of exercising faith in him? Is there no doctrinal significance and no saving efficacy in the fact that he assumed our nature in the form of an infant born of a woman, rather than in the form of a man created like Adam? They who reject the Baptism of Infants are bound by logical consistency to answer these questions in the negative. The ablest advocates of their views do not hesitate to declare that "the gospel has nothing to do with infants," that "the salvation of the gospel is as much confined to believers as Baptism is," and that "we know nothing of the means by which God receives infants nor have we any business with it" (Carson on Baptism, p. 173). All of which is undeniably true, if you first allow them to give a narrow definition to the gospel by which they beg the whole question at issue. If the gospel, as they assume, is nothing more than the proclamation of the terms on which God will save adults who are capable of believing in Christ, then, of course, the gospel has nothing to do with the salvation of infants, and its ordinances have no respect to them. But we cannot accept a definition which thus hands over our little ones to uncovenanted mercies. As we understand it, the gospel is much more and better than the proclamation of the terms on which God will save those who are capable of believing; it is the declaration of

his infinite love to a fallen world, the revelation of the way by which He seeks and saves that which was lost. We deny that any one, infant or adult, is regenerated by the proclamation of the gospel. We are born again by the Holy Spirit, whose influences, the purchase of Christ's death and intercession, are not confined to words nor to any outward means, but, like the wind which bloweth where it listeth, works when and where and how He wills. The Christian consciousness and faith of all ages have never separated the belief that infants are saved from the fact that Christ was born of a woman and died for man's redemption. How beautiful and how profound in their grasp of the true meaning of the gospel are the words of Irenæus, the disciple of Polycarp, the disciple of the Apostle John: "Christ came to redeem all to himself, all who through him are regenerated to God, infants, little children, boys, young men and old. Hence he passed through every age, and for infants he became an infant, sanctifying the infants; among the little children he became a little child, sanctifying those who belong to this age, at the same time setting them an example of piety, of well-doing, and of obedience. Among the young men he became a young man, that he might set them an example and sanctify them to the Lord."

We cannot agree with Neander that "Irenæus here testifies to the profound Christian idea *out of which Infant Baptism arose*, and which procured for it at length universal recognition." *

This reverses the order of Christian experience, according to which the prescriptive rule and the dogmatic truth came first, and under their divinely adapted influence the Christian consciousness is unfolded.

We think Dr. Schaff puts the case much more felicitously when he says:

"The ultimate authority for Infant Baptism in the bosom of a regular Christian community, and under sufficient guarantee of a pious education—for only in these terms do we advocate it—lies in the universal import of Christ's person and work which extends as far as humanity itself. A Christ able and willing to save none but adults would be no such Christ as the gospel presents. Faith does not produce the blessings of salvation, but simply receives them. Now, this receptivity of the divine, or faith in its incipient form and slumbering germ, may be found in the child even purer than in the adult. In virtue of its religious constitution and endowment, the child is susceptible to the influences of grace and may be actually regenerated. If a man deny this, he must, to be consistent, condemn all children without exception to perdition" (Schaff's "History of Apostolic Church," p. 576).

The belief that all who die in infancy are saved through Christ, which is now well-nigh universal among Protestant Christians, is not

* "History of Christian Church," vol. i., p. 311.

based upon any new revelation, but upon a clearer and broader apprehension of the old. It is the true import of the gospel that "Where sin abounded there grace did much more abound," that "As sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ" (Rom. v. 20, 21). And how can grace "abound more exceedingly" than sin does, if infants are not included in the gospel salvation? And what then did Christ mean when he took infants in his arms and declared, of such is the kingdom of God? We believe that the satisfaction which he, as the seed of the woman and the Saviour of the world, rendered to God's broken law, takes away the guilt and condemnation of Adam's sin from the whole human race. We do not say the inherited corruption and depravity of our nature which is commonly called original sin; but we say the *guilt and condemnation* of Adam's first sin; so that the multitude of the redeemed, which no man can number, will include, not only all believers, but all who have not "sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression," that is to say, all who die in infancy. We believe further that, "As in Adam all died, so in Christ shall all be made alive." For "the first man Adam was made a *living* soul, but the last Adam was made a *quickening* spirit" (1 Cor. xv. 22, 45). The analogy between the first Adam as the representative of the whole human race, and the last Adam as the representative of all the redeemed, is exact and complete. Christ not only removes the imputed guilt and condemnation of the first sin from the whole human race, and in that sense "takes away *the sin* of the world," and is "the Saviour of all men"; but as the representative of the redeemed, whether believing adults or infants dying in infancy, he is "made a quickening spirit" to regenerate them all. To limit his seed, the travail of his soul which he saw and was satisfied, to those whom we can see and from whom we can hear the confession of their faith, is to bound the vision and the purpose of Christ by our finite senses. The only restrictions we are authorized to put upon redeeming grace are those which God himself has expressly imposed. We may not exclude any whom he has not excluded. He has excluded those who hear the gospel and believe not. But he has not excluded any infants as such. Here the silence of the Scriptures is profoundly significant, and it is exactly analogous, as it is co-extensive, with their silence in regard to the Baptism of Infants. Their baptism and their salvation rest upon the same broad foundations. The silence in both cases is underlaid and pervaded by a multitude of good and necessary inferences, and re-echoes with the sweetest utterances of the still small voice of God. It is a silence and an infinitude like that which we feel

on the seashore, where the waves that murmur and break at our feet are as nothing to the fulness which stretches in our thoughts beyond the bounds of our horizon.

“ There’s a wideness in God’s mercy
Like the wideness of the sea.”

And as we believe that mercy is covenanted to our infant offspring, we do not hesitate to apply to them its outward sign and seal by baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

“ God having appointed baptism as the sign and seal of regeneration, unto whom he denies it, he denies the grace signified by it. If therefore God denies the sign unto the infant seed of believers, it must be because he denies the grace of it ; and then all the children of believing parents dying in infancy must without hope be eternally damned. I do not say all must be so who are not baptized, but all must be so *whom God would not have baptized*. But this is contrary to the goodness and love of God, the nature and promises of the covenant, the testimony of Christ receiving them to the kingdom of God, the faith of godly parents, and the belief of the church in all ages. It follows hence unavoidably that infants who die in their infancy have the grace of regeneration, and consequently as good a right unto baptism as believers themselves ” (Owen’s Works, vol. xvi., p. 260).

X. WHY THEN DO WE NOT BAPTIZE ALL INFANTS ?

If Christ’s incarnation, in the form of a child born of a woman, has a special significance and efficacy in its relation to childhood, and if all who “ have not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression ”—*i. e.*, all who die in infancy—are included among the redeemed, why do we restrict baptism to the children of believers ? The answer to this question is threefold : *First*, because baptism is not in any case the efficient cause of salvation ; it does not produce, it only signifies and seals our regeneration and engrafting into Christ. *Secondly*, because the efficacy of baptism, as a means of salvation, is not experienced by those who die in infancy, but only by those who live to maturity. An infant dying unbaptized is just as safe in Christ as though it had received the sacramental seal. *Thirdly*, because God has expressly conditioned the baptism of infants even as he has conditioned the baptism of adults. But these conditions, depending in both cases upon duties prescribed to those who are capable of performing them, do not of themselves exclude any from a participation in the sacrament. God does not *deny* baptism to any infant. This is true in the same sense that he does not deny salvation to any adult. Paul declares that “ God our Saviour will have ALL MEN to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth ” (1 Tim. ii. 4). And Peter says : “ He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance ” (2 Peter iii. 9). We take these decla-

rations in their plain and full meaning. We do not whittle them away in order to dovetail them into other Scripture statements. At the same time we recognize the fact that God has prescribed certain conditions upon which alone men can be saved. *We* may not limit the holy one of Israel in the exercise of his saving grace, but he may and does limit himself. "He so loved the world" (*i. e.*, all mankind) "that he gave his only begotten Son, that *whosoever believeth in him* should not perish, but have everlasting life." If in such declarations he seems to our finite apprehension to contradict himself, we may safely leave him to solve the difficulty. Meantime, it is enough for us to know that he has laid upon his church the obligation to go and disciple and baptize all nations.

In the same way, and with no greater apparent contradiction, he will have all infants to be baptized. He does not deny the sign and seal of his saving grace to any, even as he does not exclude any from salvation; but at the same time he has restricted the universal application of baptism to infants by the express condition that parents must themselves profess to believe and covenant to bring up their children in the faith and obedience of the gospel. This condition is expressed in the explicit terms of the Abrahamic covenant, in the command of Christ to proselyte all nations as the prerequisite to the baptism of themselves and their little ones, and in the example of the apostle in baptizing the households of believers. The minister has no discretion in this matter. His office is purely ministerial and declarative. He is to baptize only the children of those who are within the pale of the visible church and in covenant with God, just as the priest under the old dispensation was to circumcise only those whose parents, whether by birthright or adoption, stood in the same divine relationship. And the reasons for this restriction are obvious. The efficacy of baptism as a means of salvation is realized through the fidelity of those who are parties to the covenant. Ministers have no right to aid or encourage parents in making vows which there is no reasonable ground to believe they intend to fulfil. All God's purposes of salvation include the means as well as the end. There is no such thing revealed in Scripture as an absolute and unconditional decree of eternal life, to be executed irrespective of Christian character and the means by which that character is to be wrought out. A Christian education, in the case of those who live to years of maturity, is the normal and permanent agency by which salvation is to be secured. Instruction and regeneration in adult years are exceptional, and belong to the infancy and formative period of the church rather than to her maturity. As she approaches nearer to her mil-

lennial glory, and performs more fully her divine commission, she will realize more and more the fulfilment of the promise: "All thy children shall be taught of God." The miserable superstition which looks upon the administration of baptism as the *christening* or *christianizing* of a child, and the still more degrading notion which regards it as a formal and ceremonial *giving of a name*, have their root in ignorance and indifference to the true meaning of God's solemn ordinance, and go very far to explain the lamentable fact that so many children of the church repudiate their obligations and sell their birth-right for a mess of pottage.

A sufficient guarantee for the Christian education of a child is the divinely appointed and indispensable condition of its baptism. In this all Christians who reject the doctrine of the inherent efficacy of the ordinance are agreed. Still it is an open question what constitutes a sufficient guarantee, or, in other words, who are qualified to be sponsors in baptism? Who shall profess faith and obedience as its representatives, and give pledges that the child will be brought up in accordance with these professions? The Presbyterian Church, in common with most of the churches of the Reformation, has always insisted that parents, or those who actually stand in *loco parentis*—that is, those who really intend to bring up the child—are the only persons who ought to be accepted as its sureties in this solemn transaction.

It seems to us shocking to common sense and to truth that one who has only a passing interest in the little one, who has no responsibility for its education and does not expect to have a controlling influence in the moulding of its character—one who in many cases does not expect to see the child again after the ceremony,—should assume these solemn obligations and make these solemn promises in its behalf. No such practice prevailed in the early Christian Church. Bingham in his "Christian Antiquities" shows that up to the time of Augustine parents were, in all ordinary cases, sponsors for their own children.

"The extraordinary cases in which they were presented by others were commonly such cases where parents could not or would not do that kind office for them; as where slaves were presented for baptism by their masters, or children whose parents were dead, were brought by the charity of any one who would show that mercy on them, or children exposed to death by their parents which were sometimes taken up by the holy virgins of the church, and by them presented for baptism. These are the only cases mentioned by St. Augustine in which children seem to have had other sponsors and not their parents; which makes it probable that in all ordinary cases parents were sureties for their own children" (Bingham's "Christian Antiquities," vol. i., p. 552).

It goes almost without saying that adopted children stand upon the same footing, in regard to baptism, with natural children. The Gen-

eral Assembly of the Presbyterian Church has declared that "it is the duty of masters who are members of the church to present the children of parents in servitude for the ordinance of baptism, provided they are in a situation to train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord"; and also that "the children of heathen parents, who are committed to our missions, or to other Christian tuition, so as to secure effectually their entire religious education," are to be baptized upon the faith and promise of those who engage to bring them up.

It being admitted that the indispensable condition of baptism is a sufficient guarantee for the Christian education of the child, it remains to consider what are the qualifications on the part of parents, natural or adopted, which entitle them to give such a guarantee. Whose children have a right to baptism? There is an ambiguity in this question which it is very important to clear up. It is exactly parallel with the question, who have a right to be recognized as members of the visible church? This question may refer either to the abstract right in the sight of God, or to the concrete and prescriptive right in the sight of men. In God's sight none have a right to visible church-membership and to a participation in the sacraments, but those who are regenerate and made members of the invisible church. Ministers are to preach this doctrine. But from the nature of the case they cannot enforce it upon individuals, because they have not the gift of discerning spirits. They are bound to recognize as members of the visible church and to admit to all its ordinances and privileges all those who make a credible profession of their faith in Christ, *i.e.*, a confession against which there is no conclusive evidence to the contrary; not upon the certainty, but upon the presumption that they are regenerate and members of the invisible church. The responsibility for the truth or falsity of such a profession rests not upon the church or the minister who accepts it, but upon the individual who makes it. The same is true of the children of professed believers and of the profession which they make representatively through their parents. They are members of the visible church and presumptively regenerate upon the same grounds that their parents are. They are included in the covenant whose sacraments the minister is to dispense. If the acceptance of the covenant is a mere outward form, without the inward reality, then the sacramental seal, whether applied to the parent or to the child, is merely an outward sign without the inward and invisible grace, and the essential element being wanting, it is, in fact, no sacrament at all. But the minister cannot discriminate between the false and the true. He can only act upon the

presumption in the case. The Westminster Confession and Catechisms answer the question whose children are to be baptized as definitely as the nature of the case will allow. The Confession (Chap. 28, 4,) declares that "not only those who do *actually profess faith in and obedience to Christ*, but also infants of one or both believing parents, are to be baptized." By believing parents is evidently meant those who *actually profess* to believe as distinguished from those who profess in and through their representatives or sponsors. The Shorter Catechism says (Question 95), "the infants of such as are *members of the visible church* are to be baptized." And the Larger Catechism (Question 166), still further explains this position: "Infants descending from parents, either both or but one of them *professing faith in Christ* and obedience to him, are in that respect within the covenant and are to be baptized." Now this is in exact accordance with the requirements of the Abrahamic covenant in regard to the circumcision of children; and it throws upon the minister the responsibility of deciding in every case, whether those who ask for the baptism of their children are members of the visible church and make a credible profession of faith. It is easy to renounce this responsibility by baptizing all who are presented, asking no questions for conscience sake. It is easy also to evade it by baptizing only the children of those who are *communicant members* of some particular church. But where is the warrant in Scripture, or in any of the Reformed Creeds, for making church-membership and the profession of faith identical with coming to the Lord's table?

After much study of this question the writer has come deliberately to the conclusion to baptize the children of all who have themselves been baptized, who have never repudiated their covenant obligations, and who at the time of the administration of the ordinance are prepared to make a credible profession of their faith in and obedience to Christ. In the lamentable absence of any authorized form for the baptism of infants in the Presbyterian Church, we have prepared such a confession as would entitle those who make it, to come to the Lord's table, connecting with it specific and solemn promises to bring up the child to be baptized for God, by instruction, by example, and by prayer. If any parents will deceitfully or carelessly make such a confession and assume such vows, the accountability is on them, not on us. The instances in which non-communicants will ask for the baptism of their children on these conditions are not many. But there are such cases in which the known character of the applicants inspires far more confidence in their sincerity than we are able to feel toward many who have "joined the church." We dare not exclude their

children from the one sacrament because they have timid or erroneous views in regard to the other. Coming to the Lord's table and having our children baptized are both privileges of the covenant. It is not for us to say, nor can we find anything in the Word of God which lays down an invariable rule as to which of these privileges must be first embraced. The refusal in all cases to baptize the children of those who are not communicants can be justified only upon the assumption that membership in the visible church is identical with coming to the Lord's table. This, we know, is the popular notion on the subject, but it is contrary to the doctrine of all the Reformed Creeds and of the Scriptures, which agree in teaching that the children of professing Christians are born members of the visible church according to Paul's declaration in 1 Cor. vii. 14: "Else were your children unclean, but now are they *holy*," *i. e.*, separated from the world and consecrated to God by virtue of the household covenant.

Dr. Ashbel Green, in his lectures on the Shorter Catechism, admirably discusses this subject. We quote his words as an exposition and defence of our views:

"I have no belief in such a thing as a *half-way covenant*, nor am I prepared to say that the essential qualifications for a participation in both sacraments are not the same, and I distinctly say that baptism, in my judgment, ought not to be administered to those of whom there is no reasonable ground to believe, after examination and inquiry, that the requisitions of duty in chap. vii. of our Directory for Worship will be solemnly regarded and their performance conscientiously endeavored. All this notwithstanding, I cannot make abstinence from the Lord's table the ground, in all cases, for precluding from the privilege of devoting their infant offspring to God in baptism, some who are desirous of doing it, although they cannot, for the present, view themselves as prepared to go to the table of the Lord" (Green's Lectures, vol. ii., 378).

Our venerated teacher, Dr. Hodge, fully endorses these views:

"The sacraments, as all admit, are to be confined to members of the church, but the church does not consist *exclusively of communicants*. It includes all those who, having been baptized, have not forfeited their membership by scandalous living or by an act of church discipline. All members of the church are professors of religion. . . . Those, therefore, who having been themselves baptized and still professing their faith in the true religion, having competent knowledge and being free from scandal, ought not only to be permitted, but urged and enjoined to present their children for baptism" (Hodge's "Theology," vol. ii., 578).

XI. Our limits will allow only a summary answer to the question, WHAT PROFIT IS THERE IN THE BAPTISM OF INFANTS? This is substantially the question Paul discussed in regard to circumcision (in Rom. iii. 1, 2), and we may answer it as he did—"Much every way." There has always been a disposition in men to dispute the necessity of the means God chooses as the symbols and channels of his saving grace. Naaman, the leper, could not see why he should be required to wash at all, or if he must wash in order to be healed,

he thought Abana and Pharpar were better for that purpose than all the waters of Israel. There are those who deny the efficacy and obligation of all outward forms and sacraments; and they are far more consistent than those who insist upon the necessity for baptism in the case of adults, and yet deny, and even scoff at it as a useless form when applied to an unconscious infant: as though to the eye of human reason there were any better grounds for its necessity in the one case than in the other, and as though the faith on which they predicate the right to a participation in the ordinance were not as truly a gift of God's sovereign grace, as any which he bestows upon a child that is filled with the Holy Ghost from its mother's womb. If, as we have shown, the baptism of our children is warranted and required by the practice of the Christian Church in all ages, by the example of the apostles, by the conduct and words of Christ recognizing children as members of his church, by the express conditions of the Abrahamic covenant which is the perpetual charter of the church, and by the identity of circumcision with baptism as the sign and seal of that covenant; then our obligation in this matter rests upon something infinitely higher and better than our apprehensions of the good which may result from our obedience.

But we are very far from resting our answer to the question under discussion upon prescriptive authority. We are encouraged to embrace our privilege, and perform our duty by antecedent probability and by ascertained facts.

By the baptism of our little ones into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, we recognize and lay hold upon the covenant promises which are to believers and their children, and accept God's pledge that if we do our duty in the performance of our vows, his blessing will follow. We put a visible mark of distinction upon the child, separating it from the pagan and unbelieving world, and acknowledging it as a birthright member of the church of God. We put ourselves under covenant bonds to behave ourselves before our children, and to mould their character, not as "pagans suckled in a creed outworn," but as the children of God and heirs of his promises; and we endow our lips with an argument of divine persuasiveness, when at the earliest dawn of intelligence, mingled with the sweet story of old, we whisper into the souls of our children the assurance that they are the lambs of Christ's flock, and bear his mark. We believe that no Christian parent, whose example and teaching were consistent, ever made such an appeal to the tender soul of a child without evoking a quick and abiding response. It does not invalidate these reasons to observe that the carelessness and neglect of parents so often make

them of no effect. It is easy to pick out individual instances, where children seem to have been trained according to the baptismal covenant, and yet have become reprobate concerning the faith; and then generalizing from these exceptional instances to ask unbelievably, what profit is there in the baptism of infants? We believe that the comparative number of such sad cases is greatly exaggerated; that it is unwarrantably increased in our estimation by counting all as unregenerate and unconverted, who have not passed through a prescribed process of religious experience and "joined the church"; and that if we knew the secret history of the worst cases, and could trace out on the one hand the fatal defects in their Christian education, and on the other hand the instances in which divine grace triumphs in those who, like Saul of Tarsus, are "born out of due season," the sad catalogue would be largely decreased, even if it were not entirely obliterated.

The patent facts on the other side of this question, the innumerable instances in which the baptism of infants and their education in accordance therewith have brought forth immediate and apparent fruits, are full of glory to God and joy to us. The whole history of Christianity abounds with them. The household covenant has always been the glory and the beauty of the Presbyterian Church in her ministry and her membership. Unfortunately our statistics have not been kept with a definite reference to this vital subject, but the following statement of facts is very suggestive. The whole number of communicants received into our churches in six years from 1878 to 1883 inclusive, is 175,176, an average of 29,196 a year; the whole number of adults baptized during the same period is 59,109, leaving 116,067, or an average of 19,344 a year, admitted to the Lord's table from the children of the church, more than double the average number brought in from the world.* And this too at a period when the baptism of infants and the whole theory of the household covenant have fallen into comparative neglect.

We pray and look for a grand revival on this subject, which will largely increase the ministry with the best material, and give a new impulse to all the enterprises of the church. Not the least of the blessed fruits of such a revival, indeed the very root of its influence, will be its effect upon Christian parents. It is true that they are bound to bring up their children for God and his church, whether they make a covenant promise to do so or not. And so also every man is bound to live a Christian life, whether he professes his faith

* See Minutes of Assembly, 1883, p. 1106.

and obedience to Christ or not. Such professions do not create, they only acknowledge our obligations. But is there no inherent propriety, no tribute of honor to God, no stimulus and no comfort to ourselves in such acknowledgments? A king who ascends the throne of his ancestors, a chief magistrate who assumes the presidency of a great people to which he has been elected, is bound by the very inheritance or assumption of the office to discharge its duties faithfully. But is there no fitness and no moral power in the coronation or inauguration oath? The most solemn office which any man or woman can inherit or assume, which has the highest functions and draws after it the weightiest results for time and eternity, is the office of training an immortal soul. It is the type and the germ of all governmental authority; it is the image of the divine. God has no higher or more tender title than Our Father. To regard children as the unfortunate accidents of marriage is bestial. To look upon them as an encumbrance to faith is heathenish. Marriage is the divinely appointed means for propagating the church. The parental office is infinitely magnified by the fact that our children are not made but begotten by us, and receive from us by heredity untold influences for good or for evil. If the assumption of any office on earth ought to be signaled by a solemn inauguration this ought to be. The craving for such a ceremony is a parental instinct. God recognized it and wrought it into the foundations of the church in the Abrahamic covenant. To cast it out of the church is to tarnish her historic glory and to diminish her power; to root it out of the parental heart is to destroy one of its finest susceptibilities to the religion of the Bible.

The object of baptism and of Christian training is not to circumvent, but to carry out and complete the election of grace. We do not believe in any human, much less in any ceremonial or mechanical salvation. The question of the salvation of any soul turns ultimately upon the gracious counsel of God's own will. It is just as true of the preaching of the gospel and of all the means of grace as it is of baptism, that they are made effectual for salvation only to the elect, and that their "efficacy is not tied to the moment of administration." But this is the divine side of redemption, with which we have nothing to do but to believe and adore. On the human side the means are just as much ordained as the end. We must "give diligence to make our calling and election sure." We must "work out our salvation with fear and trembling *because* God works in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure." And the same is true of the salvation of our little ones. God, like a tender human mother, prepares for his true children before they are born. The cradle is made ready before they

are laid in it. He does not leave them, like the ostrich, to be hatched in the desert and fed upon sand. Christians do not come from His moulding hand like Adam, full formed; they are begotten and nourished, and grow as babes to the full stature of men. Christian nurture, beginning in infancy, inheriting traditional influences, and surrounded at the first dawn of consciousness by a religious atmosphere, is the normal and divine method for propagating the church. Of this method the baptism of infants is the visible exponent and the mutual pledge between God and his believing people. "To be unbaptized, therefore, is a grievous injury and reproach, and one which no parent can innocently entail upon a child." *

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* Hodge's "Theology," vol. iii., 579.