

# THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL.

I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.—HAB. ii. 1.

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## INFANT BAPTISM.

Whether under the law or under the Gospel, the blessing is given by promise, to which the Sacrament was superadded, as the means, and pledge, and sign and seal. The real blessing was under both appropriated by faith; it was the faith of Abraham, the Father of the Church which conveyed the spiritual blessing to his circumcised offspring; and it is the faith of the Church ever since that has conveyed the blessing to her children, whether under the Sacrament of circumcision, or of its succeeding counterpart, Baptism. The Church is still the family of faithful Abraham, her children are still the children of the promise made to him, and the seal of the promise varies with the character of the dispensation under which they are placed.

And this conclusion appears to be just, not only from the reason of the thing, as above, but from the express terms of the Apostle in the epistle to the Colossians:—"In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ—buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead." What is the plain sense of the passage? The Colossians were "circumcised with the circumcision made without hands," which circumcision consisted, "in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ," which circumcision consisted in being "buried with him in baptism," in which baptism ye are not only buried, but "wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith," &c. Let the whole passage be read, not as divided into verses, but as one connected sentence, introducing a hyphen between "Christ" and "buried," as above, and difficulty seems to be removed as to its sense; then "the circumcision of Christ" is the being buried with him in baptism, &c. In other words, what circumcision was under the law, baptism is under the gospel of Christ. This appears to be the most natural construction of the passage; it is that which is given to it by names of no mean note; the Belgic confession expressly stating, "For the which cause Paul calleth baptism the circumcision of Christ." And if baptism be admitted to be under the gospel what circumcision was under the law, (and it is apparent, as above, that circumcision conveyed spiritual blessings,) it is clear, that if infants were capable of spiritual blessings, by being partakers of the one Sacrament, they are equally capable of the same blessings by being made partakers of the other.

It is not a little remarkable that the early fathers of the Church, to the time of Augustine, consider baptism as given to us in the place of circumcision; as Origen, Cyprian, Gregory Nazianzen, Ambrose, &c.; and that three of them, Basil, Augustine, and Chrysostom, give to the above passage in the Epistle to the Colossians, the same sense as that ascribed to it above.\* The same sentiment prevailed at the reformation; and it cannot reasonably be doubted, that it has been at all times, both anterior and subsequent to that period, the generally received sentiment of the church, that what circumcision was to the faithful Jew under the law, baptism is at least to the faithful Christian under the Gospel. The covenant blessings of the Father of the faithful are sure to all his faithful seed; and as they are sealed by the blood of circumcision under the first dispensation, they are sealed by the milder seal of the

water of baptism under the second. The Church is equally "Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

To the above considerations let it be added, that baptism by water was a practice to which the Jew had long been accustomed before the coming of Christ, and to which he seems to have been especially familiarized during the ministry of our Lord, by the introductory baptism of him who was the last messenger of the law, and the preparatory harbinger of the Gospel, expressly sent, as the messenger of the Saviour, to prepare his way before him.

That the Jews had been long accustomed to this practice, is affirmed by Wall, from sufficient authority. "It is evident," says he, "That the custom of the Jews before our Saviour's time (and as they themselves affirm, from the beginning of their law,) was to baptize as well as circumcise any proselyte that came over to them from the nations. This doth fully appear, both from the books of the Jews themselves, and also of others that understood the Jewish customs, and have written of them. They reckoned all mankind besides themselves to be in an unclean state, and not capable of being entered into the covenant of Israelites without a washing or baptism, to denote their purification from their uncleanness. And this was called the baptizing of them unto Moses." This custom of the Jews continued after Christ's time, and after their expulsion from the Holy Land; and continues (as I showed from Leo Modena,) to this day, if there be any that now-a-days do turn proselytes to their religion. Wherever they sojourned, if they found any of that country that chose to be of their religion, they would not admit him unless he would first be washed or baptized by them."† Thus the idea of baptism as typical of the spiritual washing of the soul, was an idea to which the Jew had long been accustomed.

The Jews were also familiarized to baptism by the preparatory baptism of John, which was just that intermediate dispensation that formed an easy transition from the law to the Gospel. He baptized with water to repentance, which, as it does not appear to have superseded the circumcision of the law on one hand, neither did it convey the full spiritual blessings of the Gospel on the other. We do not find that infants were admitted to the baptism of John, so that circumcision, so far as appears, took place as usual, during his baptismal ministry; while, on the other hand, those who were "baptized unto John's baptism," might "not so much as hear whether there be any Holy Ghost,"‡ and must be referred to Christ for those full spiritual blessings which he alone could communicate, who was to "baptize" them "with the Holy Ghost and with fire."§ Thus John's baptism was an intermediate dispensation between circumcision and baptism, preparing the way for the substitution of the latter for the former.

With the advantage of these considerations, let us conceive a faithful Jew to be the hearer of St. Peter's first sermon, preached on the day of Pentecost, when the Gospel was completed, and when "they that gladly received his word were baptized."¶ Baptized himself, what is he to do with his child? This child has arrived at its eighth day. By the spirit of the new dispensation, circumcision is done away; and is there no sacrament under the Gospel which seals covenant blessings to his child, as circumcision did under the law? At the institution of circumcision, God has pro-

\* See Wall's "History of Infant Baptism," introduction, pp. 68—72. It does not consist with the proposed brevity of the above statement to quote the authorities given by Wall: they are well worth consulting by those who entertain any doubt of the fact.

† Acts xix. 2, 3. ‡ Matt. iii. 11. § Acts ii. 41.

\* See Wall's "Defence of the History of Infant Baptism," vol. iii. pp. 272—272. The discussion on the above text which these pages contain will repay toward a patient perusal of them.