

Contributions.

The Commission vs. Denominationalism. VII.

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When the old world was swept away with a flood and God made a covenant with the new, through Noah, he gave to that event an everlasting prominence, by constituting the "bow in the cloud," the token of that covenant. And when again he rejected the whole idolatrous world, and called Abram to be the Father of a peculiar nation, through which the Messiah should come, he gave to him "the covenant of circumcision," a rite, that was to be a "token of the covenant," and that should commemorate that important event throughout all generations. And when God brought to an end the old patriarchal age, and organized a new and better system, and gave to his chosen nation the covenant of the law, and instituted the tabernacle service, it was done at Sinai, amid scenes of grandeur and majesty that distinguished it from all events that had preceded it, and marked the birth of that dispensation as a very important epoch in the religious history of man.

Now, would it not be most natural, therefore, for the inauguration of the church or kingdom of Jesus Christ: the most important institution of all time, the theme of prophecy, from the fall of man for four thousand years, of which the costly tabernacle and temple with their splendid service were but types; and more, that scheme of redemption, and grandest manifestation of divine mercy, that was born alike of the Father's love and the agonies of his only begotten Son? I repeat then, would it not be most natural to expect that the inauguration of the kingdom or church of Jesus Christ would be attended with manifestations of divine power and majesty that should signalize the event as equal to that of Sinai, at least? The opposite supposition does not harmonize with the plain Scriptural examples, the divine order, given.

It is evident that there is no event from the giving of the law to the resurrection of Christ, that is thus signalized as the beginning of a new kingdom and system of service and worship. On the other hand, after Christ rose from the dead he positively assures the disciples that all authority in heaven on earth is His, and commands them to proclaim his sole right to the faith and obedience of mankind, to the whole creation. He gives to them the law of pardon, charges them to tarry at Jerusalem till empowered from on high, then ascends to his throne. Nine days are spent by the disciples in private prayer the tenth day, Pentecost, is signalized by the descent of the Holy Spirit, the Apostle's baptism in the Holy Spirit, and speaking as he gave them utterance, the announcement of the supreme Lordship of Jesus, as ruler and possessor of the kingdom, and of the law of induction into his kingdom according to the new covenant, for the first time. Add to this, the fact that penitent sinners were received that day upon their personal faith in Jesus as the crucified, raised, and glorified Son of God, and upon their humble repentance and immersion in his name for the first time in the world's history; and we have a display of divine power and majesty and the enforcement of a new law of forgiveness, and full procla-

mation of the regnant glory of the Christ, that as distinctly marks Pentecost as the birthday of the church, as did the display at Sinai signalize the Pentecost after the first passover as the birthday of the old economy. The birth of the church on Pentecost is clearly distinguished in the commission, and is marked as the grandest epoch of the ages! In the further proof of this let us adduce a few plain arguments.

1. The analogy of these two epochs is very striking; the first, a type of the second. (1) The patriarchal dispensation closed with the slaying of the paschal lamb in Egypt, its religious system in which the father or head of the household was priest and mediator, (as Job 1. 5) was abolished, preparatory to the bringing in of a new priesthood and a better system. So the Jewish dispensation came to an end when Christ, "our passover," was sacrificed for us (1 Cor. v. 7), and the Jewish system of legal worship, and the old covenant, abolished at his death, for he blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us; and he hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross (Col. ii. 14), and this was preparatory to the giving a better covenant, the gospel in its entirety. (2) Israel obeying the command of God was saved from the judgment that fell upon Egypt, through the blood of the slain lamb (Ex. xii. 7, 13). It is through the blood of Jesus Christ the church is saved from the judgments that will fall upon the disobedient world, "with precious blood as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1. 19), "In whom we have our redemption through his blood" (Eph. 1. 7), and many more show this. (3) The feast of the passover was given to commemorate the one event; the Lord's supper to commemorate the other. (4) An interim of forty-nine days intervenes between the departure of Israel out of Egyptian night and bondage, and the day on which the law was given. While on the fiftieth day, or Pentecost, the new or Jewish dispensation began, and the Sinaitic covenant was dedicated, and the tabernacle service with its new priesthood established. So, on the fiftieth day, or the Pentecost after Jesus left the night of the tomb, and forever spoiled the dominion of death, "death no more hath dominion over him" (Rom. vi. 9), the Christian age began, and the gospel, the new covenant, was proclaimed under the reign and everlasting priesthood of Christ.

2. According to the law of contrast, the clearest distinction is drawn between the two religious institutions, the Jewish and the Christian. (1) The spirit and genius of the two systems contrasted. The law was, "The ministration of death, written and engraven on stone;" the gospel is, "The ministration of the spirit." That was the ministry of condemnation: this, "the ministration of righteousness" (2 Cor. iii. 7, 9). And this is forcibly illustrated by a single fact—namely, at the giving of the law on Sinai for their disregard, for the commandment of the Lord and of that law by which came "the knowledge of sin," and whose penalty was death, 3000 souls perished! But, at the giving of "the law of the spirit of life," the Gospel, on Pentecost, 3000 persons, yielding to the terms of the new covenant honest obedience, were saved. In Romans viii. 2, the apostle puts the contrast in a clear light, thus: "For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death" (2) The two systems are contrasted as to the time and place of their origin, by the prophet Isaiah: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the

Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, . . . for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isa. ii. 2, 3). The law of Moses went forth from Mount Sinai; but the law of Christ went forth from Mount Zion, 1500 years later. That, on the first Pentecost after the sacrifice of the paschal lamb; but this, on the first Pentecost after the sacrifice of "the Lamb of God." The first is represented by the bondwoman, Hagar, and her bondson, in Paul's "allegory," in Gal. iv.; but the last, by Sarah, the true wife of Abraham, and her son of promise. "For these women are two covenants; one from Mount Sinai, bearing children unto bondage, which is Hagar, . . . but the Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our mother." . . . "Cast out the handmaid" (the law) "and her son" (the adherents of the law); "for the son of the handmaid shall not inherit with the son" (the church of Christ) "of the free woman" (the gospel, or new covenant). Again, the glory of the first was to pass away, while the glory of the last was to "abide in glory." Says Paul, "If the ministration of death, written and engraven on stones" (the ten commandments), "came with glory, . . . which glory was passing away, how shall not rather the ministration of the spirit" (the gospel) "be with glory?" "For if that which passeth away" (the law) "was with glory, much more that which remaineth" (the gospel) "is in glory" (2 Cor. iii. 7-11). (3) The kingdom, or church, of Jesus Christ is everywhere spoken of as a new institution, and not the old one patched up; not as "a piece of undressed cloth upon an old garment." Six hundred years before the Christian era, God said through his prophet, "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt," etc. (Jer. xxxi. 31, 32). And the apostle, in applying this prophecy, gives the reason and necessity for a new covenant—namely, that the first was faulty (Heb. viii. 7, 8), and says, "In that he saith, a new covenant, he hath made the first old. But that which is becoming old and waxeth aged is nigh unto vanishing away" (v. 13). Again: "He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By which will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (x. 9-10). Once more the apostle's testimony must be heard. Writing with respect to the end of the law's authority and dominion, he says, classing himself with the Jews, "But before faith" (the gospel) "came, we were kept in ward under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterward be revealed. So that the law is become our tutor to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith is come, we are no longer under a tutor, the law of Moses" (Gal. iii. 23-25). And his argument in Romans vii, is even still stronger. He argues that the old covenant, or law, is dead, hence it can now have no dominion over the Jew, and, of course, over no one else, seeing that it never was given for the Gentile world to obey. Thus the apostle reasons: As "the woman that hath a husband is bound by law to her husband while he liveth, but if the husband die, she is discharged from the law of the husband;" she is free, "if the husband die." So, the law being dead, he says, "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also were made dead to the law through the body of Christ, that ye should be joined to another, even to him who was raised

from the dead." . . . "We have been discharged from the law, having died to that wherein we were holden" (Romans vii. 1-6). It was put to death when "nailed to the cross," says the same apostle (Col. ii. 14). (4) The apostle shows that the priesthood of Aaron was done away, and that Christ became a high priest after the order of Melchisedec, and not being of the tribe of Levi, but of Judah, that therefore there was a change made in the priesthood; the old was taken away, and the new established. His conclusion is, "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law" (Heb. vii. 12). But "Jesus became the surety of a better covenant," and "hath his priesthood unchangeable." "He is the mediator of a better covenant," "of a new covenant," having died "for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant" (Heb. viii. 6, 9, 15). All of this shows conclusively that the Jewish and Christian churches were, distinctively, different institutions. (5) But the fact that the prophet declared, nearly nine hundred years after the law had been given, that "In the days of these things shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed" (Dan. ii. 44); and it is well known that this, promised to take place "in the latter days," had reference to the times of the Roman emperors—this fact, I say, clearly shows that the kingdom of Christ is altogether a different one from that set up at Sinai, and that it was not then in existence; and of course had no existence, neither in the days of Abraham, nor at Sinai. It need hardly be said that the kingdom of Jesus Christ could have no existence while the former one continued; and it is certain that the former one continued until Christ "took it out of the way," nailing its constitution "to the cross." His kingdom, therefore, had no existence till after his death. And when he had kept the last passover, and slept the last Sabbath in the tomb that were ever required to be kept under the old covenant, he became "the end of the law unto righteousness to every one that believes."

3. But further, it is an indisputable fact, that the kingdom or church of Jesus Christ could not have been organized before the dedication of its covenant; and it is also certain that the new covenant could not be dedicated without the shedding of blood. This is fully sustained by the statement of the apostle, that "even the first covenant hath not been dedicated without blood" (Heb. ix. 18). It is certain, then, that the church of Christ was not organized before "the blood of the covenant" (Heb. x. 29; xiii. 20) was shed. But this is placed beyond a question by the apostle as follows: "For where a testament is, there must of necessity be the death of him who made it, for a testament is of force where there hath been death; for it doth never avail while he who made it liveth" (Heb. ix. 16, 17). Now, so important, did our Lord consider the dedication of the new covenant with his own blood, that he gave the Lord's supper to commemorate the event, until the end of time.

In the immediate prospect of his sacrifice for the world's redemption, he said of the cup instituting the supper: "This is my blood of the covenant which is shed for many," and the apostle writing to the church at Corinth, 26 years later, says, "In like manner also the cup, after supper, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood; this do, as oft as ye drink it in remembrance of me; for as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death, till he come" (1 Cor. xi. 25, 26). The Lord's supper is therefore commemorative of the ratifi-

cation of the new covenant, and shows that the church did not exist before the death of Christ. In support of this fact let it be marked,

4. That there are insuperable objections to the claim, that the new kingdom was set up prior to the death and ascension of the Messiah. (1) It was not in existence during John's ministry, the personal preaching of Christ, nor of the disciples; for John, Jesus, and his disciples simply proclaim "The kingdom of heaven is at hand;" but nowhere that it was then in existence (see Matt. iii. 2; iv. 17; x. 7). (2) But it is clear, that John never was in the kingdom of heaven, though he was "much more than a prophet," for, said Jesus, "He that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matt. xi. 11). (3) Instead of teaching his disciples that the kingdom was already set up, Christ taught them to pray, "Thy kingdom come." And, (4), it was still in the future when he said to his apostles, 32 A. D., "Upon this rock I will build my church," and to Peter, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. xvi. 18, 19). Yet he assured them, that the setting up of his kingdom would be witnessed by some then standing in his presence before they should "taste of death." (5) But, if the kingdom or church was organized prior to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, its membership must have been composed of those who neither understood the spiritual nature of his kingdom, nor yet possessed the Holy Spirit themselves! It is positively stated that "the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified" (John vii. 39). And yet, that it was the Divine purpose to bestow the Holy Spirit upon all believers; is clear, since it is stated, that "This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believed on him were to receive." The Holy Spirit was not given before the ascension of Christ. He, himself, said to the disciples, "If I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I go, I will send him unto you" (John xvi. 7). The fact is, there is nothing to show, that, either a disciple of John or of Jesus, was promised or received the Holy Spirit to be enjoyed as the Comforter before the death of Jesus, nor was his name even connected with the baptism John preached, for those thus baptized, said to Paul, "We did not so much as hear whether the Holy Spirit was given" (Acts xix. 2). Now, Paul says, "If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his" (Rom. viii. 9). It follows, then, that if the church was in existence under the ministry of Jesus, it was composed of those that were "none of his!" (6) It is a fact beyond dispute, that no one, not even the apostles, believed that "Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name," etc. When he first announced that he should "be killed, and the third day be raised up," the apostle rebuked him, "Saying, be it far from thee, Lord, this shall never be unto thee." They could not believe in him as "the Son of God with power," "All authority," until the crowning proof should be given "by the resurrection of the dead" (Rom. i. 4). Nor did they believe the fact when it was declared to them, it "seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not" (Luke xxiv. 11), "For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise from the dead" (John xx. 9). It is plain why they were strictly "charged" to "tell no man that he was the Christ." Their ideas of him were crude and incor-

*The distinction sought to be made between "church" and "kingdom," by some, is purely gratuitous. Our Saviour used these terms synonymously, as (Matt. vi. 18, 19, 28) clearly shows. "Upon this rock I will build my church;" "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom," and "coming in his kingdom," are examples of this use of these terms in the New Testament.