

the external religious exercises first to the patriarchs, with whose covenant by the special blessings and external expressions were explained and while the spiritual was before. This was a confirmation of the Abrahamic covenant, made over to the patriarchs as a consuetudinary law from their fathers of the covenant of all his descendants reference of circumcision to Moses and to that of the words of our Lord, "I have given unto you circumcision, but of the Father, not of the patriarchs, and not of the Sabbath a law of Moses may

the controversy in the circumcision will de-

the prescribed circumcisions, and a pledge on the part of its deity which this faith rested, in whom the nations were to be blessed: which seed, says as promised, not yet come, so as fully to enter could no longer be done; and this leading to the accomplishment of the law. Nor could circumcision, by any, without the Christ, the circumcision also as an old covenant, both in its substance, but with respect to the seal of the restriction and peculiar religious observances of Israel, was terminated upon his office of Messiah; and the covenant not only terminated, but the peculiarity and visible church of Israel, except by proselytism, was closed. The gates of the covenant of peculiarity were done away also. It was not, but the continuance of the law, terminated by Christ. The Apostle Paul on this that in Christ there was no circumcision; that by thing, nor uncircumcised by love; faith alone come and already deemed work; faith, came into the Church of the Jews themselves. The doctrine of the

unnecessity of circumcision he applies to the Jews as well as to the Gentiles, although he specially resists the attempts of the Judaizers to impose this rite upon the Gentile converts; in which he was supported by the decision of the Holy Spirit when the appeal upon this question was made to "the Apostles and elders at Jerusalem," from the church at Antioch. At the same time it is clear that he takes two different views of the practice of circumcision, as it was continued among many of the first Christians. The first is the strong one which is expressed in Gal. v. 2-4: "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, *Christ shall profit you nothing*; for I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of *no effect* unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace." The second is the milder view which he himself must have had when he circumcised Timothy to render him more acceptable unto the Jews; and which also appears to have led him to abstain from all allusion to this practice when writing his epistle to the believing Hebrews, although many, perhaps most of them, continued to circumcise their children, as did the Jewish Christians for a long time afterward. These different views of circumcision, held by the same person, may be explained by considering the different principles on which circumcision might be practised after it had become an obsolete ordinance.

1. It might be taken in the first view of its simple institution, as the sign and seal of the Abrahamic covenant; and then it was to be condemned as denying that Abraham's seed, the Christ, had already come, since, upon his coming, every old covenant gave place to the new covenant introduced by him.

2. It might be practised and enjoined as the sign and seal of the Mosaic covenant, which was still the Abrahamic covenant with its spiritual blessings, but with restriction of its temporal promises and special ecclesiastical privileges to the line of Jacob, with a law of observances which was obligatory upon all entering that covenant by circumcision. In that case, it involved, in like manner, the notion of the continuance of an old covenant, after the establishment of the new; for thus St. Paul states the case in Gal. iii. 19: "Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions until the seed should come." And therefore it had no effect:—it had waxed old, and had vanished away.

3. Again: Circumcision might imply an obligation to observe all the ceremonial usages and the moral precepts of the Mosaic law, along with a general belief in the mission of Christ, as necessary to justification before God. This appears to have been the view of those among the Galatian Christians who submitted to circumcision, and of the Jewish teachers who enjoined it upon them; for St. Paul in that epistle constantly joins circumcision with legal observances, and as involving an obligation to do "the whole law," in order to justification. "I testify again to every man that is circumcised that he is a debtor to do the whole law; whosoever of you are justified by the law, ye are fallen from grace." "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ," Gal. ii. 16. To all persons therefore practising circumcision in this view, it is obvious that "Christ was of none effect," the very principle of justification by faith alone in him was renounced even while his divine mission was still admitted.

4. But there are two grounds on which circumcision may be conceived to have been innocently, though not wisely, practised among the Christian Jews. The first was that of preserving an ancient national distinction on which they valued themselves; and were a converted Jew in the present day disposed to perform that rite upon his children for

this purpose only, renouncing in the act all consideration of it as a sign and seal of the old covenants, or as obliging to ceremonial acts in order to justification, no one would censure him with severity. It appears clear that it was under some such view that St. Paul circumcised Timothy, whose mother was a Jewess; he did it because of "the Jews which were in those quarters," that is, because of their national prejudices, "for they knew that his father was a Greek." The second was a lingering notion that, even in the Christian church, the Jews who believed would still retain some degree of eminence, some superior relation to God; a notion which, however unfounded, was not one which demanded direct rebuke, when it did not proudly refuse spiritual communion with the converted Gentiles, but was held by men who "rejoiced that God had granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life." These considerations may account for the silence of St. Paul on the subject of circumcision in his Epistle to the Hebrews. Some of them continued to practise that rite, but they were probably believers of the class just mentioned; for, had he thought that the rite was continued among them on any principle which affected the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, he would no doubt have been equally prompt and fearless in pointing out that apostasy from Christ which was implied in it, as when he wrote to the Galatians.

Not only might circumcision be practised with views so opposite that one might be wholly innocent, although an infirmity of prejudice; the other such as would involve a rejection of the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ; but some other Jewish observances also stood in the same circumstances. St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Galatians, a part of his writings from which we obtain the most information on these questions, grounds his "doubts" whether the members of that church were not seeking to be "justified by the law," upon their observing "days, and months, and times, and years." Had he done more than "doubt," he would have expressed himself more positively. He saw their danger on this point; he saw that they were taking steps to this fatal result, by such an observance of these "days," &c., as had a strong leaning and dangerous approach to the dependence upon them for justification which would destroy their faith in Christ's solely sufficient sacrifice; but his very doubting, not of the fact of their being addicted to these observances, but of the *animus* with which they regarded them, supposes it possible, however dangerous this Jewish conformity might be, that they might be observed for reasons which would still consist with their entire reliance upon the merits of Christ for salvation. Even he himself, strongly as he resisted the imposition of this conformity to Jewish customs upon the converts to Christianity as a matter of necessity, yet in practice must have conformed to many of them, when no sacrifice of principle was understood; for, in order to gain the Jews, he became "as a Jew."

From these observations, which have been somewhat digressive, we return to observe that not only was the Abrahamic covenant, of which circumcision was the sign and seal, a covenant of grace, but when this covenant in its ancient form was done away in Christ, then the old sign and seal peculiar to that form was by consequence abolished. If, then, baptism be not the initiatory sign and seal of the same covenant in its new and perfect form, as circumcision was of the old, this new covenant has no such initiatory rite or sacrament at all; since the Lord's supper is not initiatory, but, like the sacrifices of old, is of regular and habitual observance. Several passages of Scripture, and the very nature of the ordinance of baptism, will, however, show that baptism is to the new covenant what circumcision was to the old, and took its place by the appointment of Christ.