

whom all nations were to be blessed; so is faith in Christ also an indispensable condition for baptism in all persons of mature age; and no minister is at liberty to take from the candidate the visible pledge of his acceptance of the terms of God's covenant, unless he has been first taught its nature, promises, and obligations, and gives sufficient evidence of the reality of his faith, and the sincerity of his profession of obedience. Hence the administration of baptism was placed by our Lord only in the hands of those who were "to preach the gospel," that is, of those who were to declare God's method of saving men "through faith in Christ," and to teach them "to observe all things, whatsoever Christ had commanded them." Circumcision was connected with teaching, and belief of the truth taught; and so also is Christian baptism.

The question, however, which now requires consideration is, whether the infant children of believing parents are entitled to be made parties to the covenant of grace, by the act of their parents, and the administration of baptism?

In favour of infant baptism the following arguments may be adduced. Some of them are more direct than others; but the reader will judge whether, taken altogether, they do not establish this practice of the church, continued to us from the earliest ages, upon the strongest basis of scriptural authority.

1. As it has been established that baptism was put by our Lord himself and his apostles in the room of circumcision, as an initiatory rite into the covenant of grace; and as the infant children of believers under the Old Testament were entitled to the covenant benefits of the latter ordinance, and the children of Christian believers are not expressly excluded from entering into the same covenant by baptism; the absence of such an explicit exclusion is sufficient proof of their title to baptism.

For if the covenant be the same in all its spiritual blessings and an express change was made by our Lord in the sign and seal of that covenant, but no change at all in the subjects of it, no one can have a right to carry that change farther than the Lawgiver himself, and to exclude the children of believers from entering his covenant by baptism, when they had always been entitled to enter into it by circumcision. This is a censurable interference with the authority of God; a presumptuous attempt to fashion the new dispensation in this respect so as to conform it to a mere human opinion of fitness and propriety. For to say that, because baptism is directed to be administered to believers when adults are spoken of, it follows that children who are not capable of personal faith are excluded from baptism, is only to argue in the same manner as if it were contended that, because circumcision, when adults were the subjects, was only to be administered to believers, therefore infants were excluded from that ordinance, which is contrary to the fact. This argument will not certainly exclude them from baptism by way of inference, and by no act of the Maker and Mediator of the covenant are they shut out.

2. If it had been intended to exclude infants from entering into the new covenant by baptism, the absence of every prohibitory expression to this effect in the New Testament must have been misleading to all men, and especially to the Jewish believers.

Baptism was no new ordinance which our Lord instituted it, though he gave to it a particular designation. It was in his practice to adapt, in several instances, what he found already established, to the uses of his religion. "A parable, for instance, was a Jewish mode of teaching. Who taught by parables equal to Jesus Christ? And what is the most distinguished and appropriate rite of his religion? A service grafted on a passover custom among the Jews of his day? It was not ordained by Moses, that a part of the bread they had used in the passover should be the last thing they ate after their supper; yet this our Lord took as he found it, and converted it into a memorial of his body. The cup of blessing has no authority whatever from the original institution; yet this our Lord found in use, and adopted as a memorial of his blood:—taken together, these elements form one commemoration of his death. Probability, arising to rational certainty, therefore, would lead us to infer that, whatever rite Jesus approved as the ordinance of admission into the community of his followers, he would also adopt from some service already existing—from some token familiar to the people of his nation.

"In fact, we know that 'divers baptisms' existed under the law, and we have every reason to believe that the admission of proselytes into the profession of Judaism was really and truly marked by a washing with water in a ritual and ceremonial manner. I have always understood that Maimonides was perfectly correct when he says, 'In all ages, when a heathen (or a stranger by nation) was willing to enter into the covenant of Israel, and gather himself under the wings of the majesty of God, and take upon himself the yoke of the law—he must be first circumcised, and secondly, BAPTIZED, and thirdly, bring a sacrifice; or if the party be a woman, then she must be first BAPTIZED, and secondly, bring a sacrifice.' He adds, 'At this present time when (the temple being destroyed) there is no sacrifice, a stranger must be first circumcised, and secondly, baptized.'"

"Dr. Gill, indeed, in his Dissertation on Jewish Proselyte Baptism, has ventured the assertion that 'there is no mention made of any rite or custom of admitting Jewish Proselytes by baptism, in any writings or records before the time of John the Baptist, Christ, and his Apostles; nor in any age after them for the first three or four hundred years; nor, however, before the writings of the Talmuds.' But the learned doctor has not condescended to understand the evidence of this fact. It does not rest on the testimony of Jewish records solely; it was in circulation among the heathen, as we learn from the clear and demonstrative testimony of Epictetus, who has the words: (he is blaming those who assume the profession of philosophy without acting upon it): 'Why do you deceive the multitude? Why do you pretend to be a Greek when you are a Jew, a Syrian, an Egyptian?'