

INFANT CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.

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And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.---GENESIS XVII: 7.

IV. BAPTIZED INFANTS CHURCH MEMBERS.

Before proceeding to consider the privileges to which infant Church members are entitled, it is necessary to make a few remarks, relative to their Church relationship, with a view of removing false impressions from the minds of the young, and giving them correct views of their true position.

If the arguments already adduced be sound; and the conclusions arrived at be correct; then, upon parents entering into covenant with God for their children, which they do when they present them for baptism, these children are henceforth to be regarded as being in the same fold with the parents themselves. The same mark is now upon old and young alike. Baptized children are then in the Church long before they make a public profession of their faith, and personally assume their covenant obligations. When therefore such persons speak of joining the Church, their language is incorrect. They are joined to the Church already, and a profession of religion is simply a declaration upon their part, that they wish the union continued--and an open avowal of their determination to discharge the duties which such a union involves. Whenever a young person who has been baptized, arrives at an age capable of understanding the nature of his position,—the nature of the engagements entered into by his parents for him, and has sufficient knowledge upon these points, God requires him to ratify the doings of his parents on his behalf by an open profession. This constitutes him a member of the Church in full communion, and entitles him to a Church privileges. If he neglect to do so, because conscious that he wants the requisite qualifications; or, if upon application to be admitted to the full privileges of the Church, he should be rejected for want of sufficient knowledge, and evidence of faith; he is not cast out of the Church by such refusal. He is simply to be regarded as a member walking in darkness, and in violation of his

baptismal vows. Such a person is still a member, and no one consecrated to the Deity in baptism, can ever cease to be a member of the Church, except by actual ex-communication—an act which can be performed only by the office-bearers in the Church, whom the Head of the Church has appointed to administer the laws thereof.

Some seem to entertain the idea that "Church Membership" under any circumstances necessarily admits the individual to all the privileges of the Church, and therefore find it difficult to distinguish between *real membership* and membership in *full communion*. Hence it is, that the young feel, and act, as if they were not members of the Church until they make a public profession of their faith. The Church is a family. But whilst there are some sons in their enjoyment of all the privileges of the family, there are others, who being *minors*, and incapable of appreciating these privileges are not in possession of them. Yet are they all sons in the family. So in the visible Church of Christ; there are infant members who have not yet attained to the full stature of perfect men in Christ, nor to the privileges of such men. It is doubtless owing, in a large measure, to the ignorance which prevails among the young in our congregations on this important subject, that so few publicly profess religion. They do not realize their relationship to the Church.

I shall now proceed to consider the privileges to which the baptized youth are entitled.

The Church is to exercise its supervision over them.

By the Church, I mean, not only the office-bearers in the Church, but all in full communion. To what extent the baptized youth of the Church are subject to the watchful care and discipline of its members, is a very important matter, yet delicate question. If we were to judge by the practice of most Churches, the answer which we would have to give to such a question, would be,—"to no extent at all." The question must however be answered very differently. There is a duty which the interest of the Church demands should be performed. As members of the Church they must be treated as other members, except where their age and condition will not allow. This then is to be kept in remembrance as our guiding principle in what is to follow.

The Church then is to watch over its baptized children as faithfully as over its adult members. When they fall into open sin, the Church should mourn over