

DOCTRINAL.

INFANT BAPTISM.

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"COMETH this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had being yet uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed to them also: and the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not made to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression."—Rom. iv. 9–15.

THE following is the paraphrase:—"Doth the blessing of an imputed righteousness come then upon the circumcision only? or may it come upon those who are uncircumcised? We have said that it came upon Abraham, and that it was faith which was reckoned to him for righteousness. Now in what circumstances was he at the time when it was reckoned? Was he in circumcision or uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And circumcision he received merely as a token, or as a seal, of the righteousness of that faith which he had when he was uncircumcised; that he might be the great exemplar of all those who after him should believe, though they were not circumcised; that to them also, even as unto him, there might be an imputation of righteousness; and that he might furthermore be the exemplar of those who were circumcised; and were at the same time, more than this, walking in the steps of that faith which their father Abraham had while uncircumcised. For the promise that he should obtain the inheritance, was not to Abraham or his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they only are to inherit who fulfil the law, then faith is rendered powerless, and the promise can have no fulfilment. Because the law worketh wrath, and not favour; and it is only when it is taken out of the way, that transgression is removed, and righteousness can be imputed."

The first lesson we shall endeavour to draw from this passage is, that it seems to contain in it the main strength of the scriptural argument for infant baptism. It looks a rational system, to make sure of the thing signified ere you impress the sign; to make sure of the belief ere you administer the baptism: if this outward ordinance signify any thing at all, to make sure that what is so signified be a reality. And all this has been applied with great appearance of force and plausibility to this question; and the principle deduced out of it, that, ere this great initiatory rite of our faith be laid upon any individual, he should make a credible profession of that faith. In confirmation of this, we are often bidden to look to the order in which these two things succeed one another in the first ages of Christianity. We read of this one convert and that other having believed and been baptized; not of any having been baptized, and then believing. And so this should be the order with every grown up person who is not yet baptized. Should there be any such person who, from accidental circumstances, has not had this rite administered to him in his own country, demand the profession of his faith, be satisfied that it is a credible profession, ere you baptize him. Let Missionaries, these modern Apostles, do the same in the pagan countries where they now labour; just as the first Apostles did before them; just as it was done with Abraham of old, who, agreeably to Paul's argument, first believed, and afterwards underwent the rite of circumcision. But mark how it fared with the posterity of Abraham. He, the first Hebrew, believed and was circumcised;

and it was laid down for a statute in Israel, that all his children should be circumcised in infancy. In like manner, the first Christians believed and were baptized; and though there be no statute laid down upon the subject, yet is there no violation of any contrary statute, when all our children are baptized in infancy. At the origin of the two institutions the order of the succession is the same with both. The thing signified took precedence of the sign. Along the stream of descent which issued from the first of them, this order was reversed, and by an express authority too, so as that the sign took precedence of the thing signified. And so it has been the very general practice with the stream of descent that issued from the second of them; and if the want of express authority be pleaded against us, we reply, that this is the very circumstance which inclines us to walk in the footsteps of the former dispensation. Express authority is needed to warrant a change; but it is not needed to warrant a continuation. It is this very want of express authority, we think, which stamps on the opposite system a character of presumptuous innovation. When once bidden to walk in a straight line, it does not require the successive impulses of new biddings to make us persevere in it. But it would require a new bidding to justify our going off from the line into a track of deviation. The first Christians believed and were baptized. Abraham believed and was circumcised. He transmitted the practise of circumcision to infants. We transmit the practice of baptism to infants. There is no satisfactory historical evidence of our practice having ever crept in,—the innovation of a later period in the history of the church. Had the mode of infant baptism sprung up as a new piece of sectarianism, it would not have escaped the notice of the authorship of the times. But there is no credible written memorial of its ever having entered among us as a novelty; and we have, therefore, the strongest reason for believing that it came down in one uncontrolled tide of example and observation from the days of the Apostles. And if they have not, in the shape of any decree, or statutory enactment, that can be found in the New Testament, given us any authority for it, they at least, had it been wrong, and when they saw that whole families of discipleship were getting into this style of observation would have interposed and lifted up the voice of their authority against it. But we read of no such interdict in our Scriptures; and, in these circumstances, we hold the inspired Teachers of our faith to have given their testimony in favour of infant baptism, by giving us the testimony of their silence.

It is vain to allege that the Jewish was a grosser dispensation; not so impregnated with life and rationality and spiritual meaning as ours; with a ceremonial appended to it for the purpose mainly of building up a great outward distinction between the children of Israel and all the other families that were on the face of the earth; and that this was one great use of circumcision, which, whether affixed during the period of infancy or advanced life, served equally to signalize the people, and so to strengthen that wall of separation which, in the wisdom of Providence, had been raised for the sake of keeping the whole race apart from the general world till the ushering in of a more comprehensive and liberal dispensation. "The flesh profiteth nothing," says the Saviour; "the words I speak unto you they are spirit and they are life." But it so happens that in the ordinance of circumcision, there are the very spirit and the very life which lie in the ordinance of baptism. Viewed as a seal, it marks a promissory obligation on the part of God, of the same privileges in both cases; and that is the righteousness of faith. Viewed as a sign, it indicates the same graces. It indicates the existence of faith, and all its accompanying influences on the character of him who has been subjected to it. "That is not circumcision which is outward