

Infant Baptism

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Free Presbyterian Magazine – January 1912

SHOULD THE INFANTS OF SUCH AS ARE MEMBERS OF THE VISIBLE CHURCH BE BAPTISED?

THE question of infant baptism has been widely discussed and variously answered, and has divided Christians into Paedobaptists and Antipaedobaptists. The discussion of this subject may be designated by some as unprofitable controversy. Nothing should be done ignorantly, and Paedobaptists should have some intelligent ground for the practice of baptising their infants. In approaching this subject, let it be understood at the outset, that with regard to adult believers, there is no difference of opinion. If they are not baptised in infancy, they are to obey the command of Christ and to be baptised in his name. "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved" (Mark xvi. 15, 16). The question then is not about adults, but infants. Should the infants of such as are members of the visible Church be baptised? Our opponents (the Antipaedobaptists) hold that, as there is a connection between faith and baptism, those only who are believers ought to be baptised, and consequently, infants who are incapable of faith are not to be baptised. At the same time, they hold that many, if not all, infants are saved. But the above argument which excludes infants from baptism, because incapable of believing, excludes them also from salvation, and we shall leave our opponents to choose between the two alternatives. Antipaedobaptists call upon us for the production of express precept authorising the baptism of children. Are we not the better entitled to require the production of such precept from them, repealing and setting aside the ancient practice of receiving infants into the visible Church? The covenant made with Abraham was the basis of the Church under the old and new dispensations, and this is of great importance in our argument, because it makes the Church the same under the two dispensations. Now, circumcision was the sign of the blessings, and seal of the promises of the covenant which was made with Abraham, and by the divine command it was administered to children on the eighth day after their birth. If there were any in the Jewish Church who held the views of the Antipaedobaptists, might they not have said, "Children have not yet attained the use of reason and are therefore disqualified from coming under a moral obligation. How can they

obey a law which they do not understand? It is a rite without meaning to them. Let it be reserved for grown-up persons who can understand its designs." Yet the Jewish male children were circumcised on the eighth day, and the persons circumcised came under solemn obligations to conform to the law and ordinances of the Church. For "every man that is circumcised is a debtor to do the whole law" (Gal. v. 3). The above argument is what our antagonists practically put forward, that, because infants are incapable of understanding the design of this seal of the covenant, that it is only mockery to administer this sacrament to them. No doubt, in the case of Abraham, faith preceded circumcision, but did this exclude his seed from being circumcised, when they had not yet attained to any understanding? If circumcision then, as a religious rite, and a seal of the covenant made with Abraham, which was the covenant of grace, and the basis of the Jew Testament Church, was administered to the children of such as were members of the visible Church, and they (their children) became members of the same thereby, by what authority do the Antipaedobaptists debar the children of such as are believers now from the privilege which they formerly enjoyed? Our opponents make much of this, that we are under a new dispensation. This is not disputed by any, but we deny that the New Testament Church is distinct from the Old. Such is, far from being the manner in which the matter is represented either in the Old or the New Testament. To prove this, many passages from the Old and New Testaments might be quoted. Perhaps one passage from each will be sufficient to show the force of this argument. (1) "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the Lord that doeth this" (Amos ix. 11, 12). How was all this to be done? We are not left to wander in the wilderness of uncertainty; for the answer to this prediction is clearly explained by one of the inspired writers in Acts xv. [4-17. This was to be done by bringing the Gentiles into the Church of Christ. (2) "And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again. For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree, which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree; how much more Infant Baptism. 349 shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree" (Rom. xi. 23, 24). Were the Old and New Testament Churches different, it is not easy to see with what propriety the Jews, in being brought into the latter, could be said to be grafted in again to their own olive tree from

which they had been cut off. The tree is not represented as being cut down, or rooted up-not a new tree planted, but an old one. Some of the branches were cut off, some remained on, others were engrafted; the stock remained the same. Having shown then that the Church is the same in every age, and that infants were received into it under the old dispensation, we have a right to ask those who would now deny them this privilege to show their authority in doing so. It is no argument to say that the Christian dispensation is more spiritual than the Jewish, for circumcision was a seal of the "righteousness of faith" as much as baptism is. Therefore the latter may be administered with as much propriety to infants as the former. Antipaedobaptists say that the New Testament is silent on the matter, and that we ought to quote an express precept to baptise infants. What occasion was there to signify children? The only thing .that could have rendered an allusion to infants necessary was their exclusion from the privilege which they had hitherto enjoyed. That the Jews who were converted to Christianity had no apprehension of the exclusion of children, is evident from the fact, that there is not any reference made to it by any of them. Is it likely that they should have remained silent had such a change taken place? They remained silent because no such change took place. The Apostle Peter, on the day of Pentecost, seems to allude to the perpetuity of this law, when he says, " Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost; for the promise is to you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." The promise was not only to themselves but also to their children, and the latter, consequently, were not to be debarred from their privilege of baptism, the seal of the covenant. Before closing these arguments, let us consider how Christ and His Apostles treated children. (I) Christ Himself received children. "And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them; and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not j for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark x. 13). The "kingdom of God" is the New Testament Church, including both its state in this world and in that which is to come. If the kingdom of God here may be taken as the Gospel dispensation, does not the expression signify that infants are capable of being members of the Church? At any rate, it is not the language of exclusion. On the contrary, it shows that such little children were capable of being subjects of His spiritual kingdom, and would it be a likely thing that Jesus

at the same time would cut them off from the eternal sign of connection with the kingdom He was establishing? Surely such teaching is not easily believed.

(2) The practice of the Apostles. The fact that the Apostles baptised households or families cannot be denied. Of this we have several instances. (a) The case of Lydia-" The Lord opened her heart, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptised, and her household" (Acts xvi. 15). (b) The Philippian jailor-" And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptised, he and all his, straightway" (Acts xvi. 33)' (c) The household of Stephanas -" I baptised also the household of Stephanas" (I Cor. i. 16). It might be noticed that the word "house" (oikos) means one's family or offspring. Taking these instances of the households which were baptised, as supported by the use of the word "house," and connected with the ancient custom of circumcision, are we not warranted in holding that the Apostles in baptising families baptised among them infants, unless our Baptist friends can prove the contrary? It has been put forward by our opponents that it cannot be proved that there were infants among these families. Is it not probable, in the highest degree, that among such a vast number of people, made up of families, there were infants? Those, who maintain that there were not, are bound to produce their proof. Till they do so, we shall hold that there were children in the families baptised. Many more arguments might be adduced to prove that the infants of believing parents ought to be baptised, but those we have brought forward prove that it is a privilege which Baptists have no right or authority to withhold from the children of believers. N.M.