

dispensation itself, *which enjoins all the peculiar duties which belong it.* \*

2. By many Pedobaptist writers, especially the advocates of national churches, the argument from the Abrahamic or Jewish dispensation, is stated in a manner somewhat different from that which we have been considering.

*Infants, they say, were constituted members of the visible church; they have never been excluded from the church, and consequently are now members.*

This argument, when analyzed, stands thus: Infants were constituted members of the Abrahamic or Jewish church; they were never excluded from this church; therefore they are members of the christian church. Is this conclusive? The whole strength of the argument rests in the supposition, that the christian church is the same with the Abrahamic or Jewish. How can this be proved?

It cannot be proved, by showing, that they are founded on the same covenant; for there is no evidence, that the covenant of circumcision is the same with the covenant of grace.

Nor can it be proved, by adducing promises and prophecies of the perpetuity of Zion, and her final triumph and glory. Some of these promises and prophecies relate to the final conversion and restoration of the Jewish people. Others evidently belong to the true church; to that Zion that includes all the saints, who existed before the organization of a visible church, and all the truly pious, whether

\* *Dissert. on the Qualifications for the Christian Sacraments*, Chap. ii. Sect. v.

they have belonged to any organized visible church or not. No one denies the perpetuity and identity of the church of God, to which the promises and prophecies belong. In order to make the application of these promises and prophecies bear on the subject, it is necessary to show, that they belong not to that church, which commenced in the persons of our first parents, and will continue to the end of the world, but to a particular organized body, which commenced in the family of Abraham.

Nor can the point be proved, from the apostle's discourse concerning the olive tree, from which the Jews, the natural branches, were broken off, and into which the believing Gentiles were engrafted ; \* unless it be shown that the olive tree represents that particular organized body, the Abrahamic or Jewish church, or in the words of Dr. Austin, 'the society of Israel.'

It is evident, that the olive tree cannot represent this body or society, as existing under the Sinai law, for Gentile believers are not introduced into a similar state. And is it not equally evident, that, for a similar reason, it cannot represent this body or society, as founded on the covenant of circumcision? The ingrafted branches are represented, as partaking of the root and fatness of the olive tree. But whatever blessings Gentile believers enjoy, they do not enjoy the peculiar blessings, secured in the covenant of circumcision. They do not inherit the land of Canaan, though that was one distinct, principal promise in this covenant. Nor can it be admitted, that they enjoy the favor of God, in that sense, and

\* Rom. xi. 16 — 24.

in that only, in which it was engaged to the posterity of Abraham.\* The olive tree cannot, therefore, represent the community of Israel, as founded on the covenant of circumcision; nor, for the same reason, can it represent the covenant itself.

Christ said to his disciples, 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. *Every branch in me, that beareth not fruit, he taketh away.*' † This may suggest the proper interpretation of the symbolical language of the apostle. The olive tree may represent the Messiah, as presented in the gospel promise made to Abraham, and in subsequent promises, in which all the pious cordially rested, and in which the Jews, *as a nation*, professed to rest. They are called natural branches, conformably to the language of the evangelist, 'He came unto *his own*, and *his own* received him not.' ‡ The natural branches were unfruitful, and, therefore, according to the prediction of Christ, were taken away; or, in the style of the apostle, because of unbelief they were broken off; and in their place the believing Gentiles were ingrafted, and now partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree, the riches of grace in Jesus Christ.

\* Dr. AUSTIN. 'The reinsertion of these broken off branches into the good olive tree (alluding to the restoration of the Jews.) can mean no less than their occupying the place, which they held, before they were broken off. Occupying this place, they necessarily partake of the fatness of the olive tree. This is the blessing, the entire blessing secured in the promise. But the land of Canaan is expressly a part of this blessing. Their being brought back then under the covenant, must necessarily restore them to the enjoyment of this land.' *View of the Economy of the Church of God*, Chap. xiv. p. 305.

If this reasoning be correct, it follows, that Gentile believers cannot be considered as ingrafted into the olive tree, because they do not inherit the land of Canaan, which is expressly a part of the blessing secured in the promise, and represented by the fatness of the olive.

† John xv. 1, 2.

‡ John i. 11.

Nor can it be proved, that the churches are the same, by showing, that they are alike in some respects. Much labor has been expended, in exhibiting those points, in which the churches are alike. But surely, two things may be alike in many respects, and still not be the same. It is granted, that they are not alike in all respects. The very point, therefore, necessary to be proved, is, that they are alike in that respect, which concerns the question, the mode of introduction, or the requisites to admission. To ascertain whether two institutions are alike in any one respect, we must form an idea of each, from all the information we can obtain, and compare the ideas.

On examining the Scriptures, with regard to the Jewish church, we find, that it was *a select race*, composed chiefly of the posterity of Abraham, in the line of Isaac and Jacob. To be descended from Abraham, in this line, was sufficient to introduce the subject into the Jewish church. Persons of Gentile extraction, also, who were purchased by Jews, or wished to enjoy the privileges of Jews, could be introduced into this church by circumcision.\* Whether any other requisite to admission was appointed by God, we are not informed. This church continued nearly two thousand years. At length, Christ came, and according to ancient prophecies, *set up his kingdom* in the world.† He abolished the distinction, which had so long subsisted between the posterity of Abraham and other nations, and either in person, or by his Spirit, selected his followers from both Jews and Gentiles, thus making 'in himself, *of twain, one new man.*'‡

\* Exod. xii. 44—49.

† Dan. ii. 44.

‡ Eph. ii. 15.

On examining the Scriptures, with regard to this new kingdom, the Christian church, we learn, from the formation of particular churches, and the instructions addressed to the members, as well as from addresses made to both Jews and Gentiles, who were without, that it is a society, composed of *select individuals*, who, not merely collectively or nationally, but personally, profess faith in Christ: credible evidence of personal piety being the requisite to admission. Whether natural descent, or any religious rite, is sufficient to introduce the subject into this church, we are not informed. We have, therefore, no evidence, that, in that respect, which concerns the question before us, the two churches are alike.

It has, however, been supposed, that the church membership of infants, is supported in the following passage: ‘Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me; *for of such is the kingdom of heaven.*’\*

In the Gospels of Mark and Luke, it follows, ‘Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God, as a little child, he shall not enter therein.’† We cannot suppose, that our Lord used words, in such different senses, in the same speech, as would unavoidably mislead his hearers. In the latter passage, the kingdom of God denotes heaven, and to receive the kingdom, as a little child, is to receive it with the humility and docile disposition which characterize children. This passage explains the former. Of such, says Christ, is the kingdom of heaven. Does he mean, of such in age and size, of such in the

\* Matt. xix. 14.

† Mark x. 15, & Luke xviii. 17.

moral temper of the heart, or of such in humility and docility of disposition? His subsequent remark determines in favor of the latter meaning. Nor is this a singular application of the phrase. On another occasion, he says, 'Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.'\* He certainly does not mean, 'Except ye become as little children, in age and size, but in humility; for he immediately adds, 'Whosoever, therefore, shall *humble himself, as this little child,*' &c. †

The following passage also has been supposed to favor the church membership of infants: 'For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; *else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.*' ‡

The holiness ascribed to the children, cannot be moral holiness, for it is ascribed to the unbelieving parent also. Nor can it be ceremonial or federal holiness, securing a title to church membership, or any church privilege; for though it is ascribed to the unbelieving parent, he is not considered a member of the church, or entitled to any church privilege. Nor is this interpretation consistent with the apostle's reasoning. It appears, that the Corinthians had in-

\* Matt. xviii. 3.

† Matt. *Suffer little children.* Mark. *Suffer the little children.* Luke. *Suffer little children.* It should, however, be observed, that, in the original, the expression is the same in each gospel. The article is uniformly inserted; though, by our translators, it is omitted in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Without the article, the words of Christ seem to form a *general* direction concerning little children; but, with the article, they evidently form a *particular* direction, concerning *those children*, whose approach the disciples were preventing.

‡ 1 Cor. vii. 14.