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Godliness Excludes Slavery.

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# G O D L I N E S S

E X C L U D E S

## S L A V E R Y.

By Isaac Backus.

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*Ye are bought with a Price, be not ye the servants  
of men.*

I COR. vii. 23.

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B O S T O N :

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To Mr. JOHN CLEAVELAND, of Ipswich.

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DEAR SIR,

**F**ORTY trying years have rolled over us, since we came out from the tyranny which the world had long exercised over the church of CHRIST. And though by reason of our distant stations, we have had no late interviews together, yet I have ever esteemed you as a true preacher of the gospel; and the noble stand you made, above twenty years ago, against the torrent of corruption in doctrine then coming in upon our country, with the special blessings of grace soon after granted under your ministry, greatly increased my regards for you. How affecting then must it be, to see you ascribe that to human inventions and satanical delusion, which I fully believe is from the truth and spirit of GOD! which is exactly the case, in your late piece upon infant baptism. Therefore permit an old friend to add a few remarks, to what Mr. *Foster* has pertinently wrote upon this subject.

Your capital argument is, "That the visible church under the gospel is the same visible body continued from Abraham." p. x. I agree with you, that the invisible church is the same; but the visible church cannot be so.

1st. BECAUSE an interest in the covenant of grace never gave any person a right to circumcision or baptism, without a positive institution. Abel, Enoch, Noah, and many others were in the covenant of grace,  
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and yet had no right to either of those ordinances, because GOD gave them no command therefor. Neither had Lot any right to circumcision, though Abraham's nephew, and a gracious man; and favours were shown to his posterity for his sake, four hundred years afterwards. Deut. ii. 9. 19. Yea, Abram himself was called forth to view the stars that he could not number, upon which it was said, *So shall thy seed be: And he believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness*, above twenty years before he had any warrant to circumcise any person upon earth. And from thence Paul proved that circumcision was out of date, after the death of CHRIST. Gen. xv. 6. Rom. iv. 3, 11.

2d. YOUR argument cannot stand, because since the death of CHRIST the distinction between the church and the world is not *carnal* but *spiritual*. I agree with y<sup>e</sup> u, that before the distinction was between the circumcision and uncircumcision: but since "He is not a Jew, who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the *flesh*; but he is a Jew, who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the *heart* in the *spirit*, and not in the *letter*, whose praise is not of men, but of God." All are naturally wedded to the law and their own lusts, until they are made *dead* thereto, and *alive* to God, by a work of his *spirit* in their hearts; so as to serve him in *newness of spirit*, and not in the *oldness of the letter*: which great change is publicly represented in the administration of *baptism*, Rom. ii. 28, 29. vi. 4. vii. 3—6.

3d. YOUR argument cannot stand, because the church of CHRIST is neither a tyrant nor a slave, but a free woman. *He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised; and my covenant shall be in your flesh*, said GOD

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GOD to Abraham. Gen. xvii. 13. And for four hundred years, no person might be admitted into that church, but such. And *the day* whereon GOD gave them a warrant to admit *strangers by households*, was THE DAY which he fixes upon, to describe the difference between the *old covenant* which was ready to *vanish away*, and his *new covenant* that constitutes the Christian church. Exod. xii. 48. Heb. viii. 8—13. This new covenant was made with Israel and Judah, with believers of that church: but the covenant was *new*, and *not according* to the covenant made with their fathers; especially in this, that many who were expressly taken into the first covenant did *not know GOD*, Deut. xxix. 4—13. but, according to his institution, none are in the second but such as *all know him, from the least unto the greatest*. And those who were in Abraham's covenant and did not know him, were expressly excluded from baptism, by the first administrator thereof. Mat. iii. 9, 10. The first son of Abraham that was circumcised was the son of the bond-woman, an allegory of the Jewish church, which was in bondage with her children, when CHRIST came and constituted a free church out of her believing members; among whom the Gentiles were grafted in and *stood by faith*. Gal. iv. 22—26. Rom. xi. 6. 20. This is the line which GOD has drawn, between the church and the world. According to the *letter* Abraham was the head of the Hebrew church, into which none could be admitted, but by being born in his house, or bought with his money: but according to the *spirit*, CHRIST is the only head of his church, wherein none have any true right, but such as are purchased by his blood, and renewed by his grace; to whom he says, *Ye are bought with a price, be not ye the servants of men*.

HE has abolished the hereditary distinctions among mankind, which were made by that old covenant, and fixed upon ADAM and CHRIST as the two public heads of the world and of the church. We all bear the *image* of our *earthly* head, until the *quicken- ing spirit* creates in us the *image* of the *heavenly*. Eph. ii. 17—19. 1st. Cor. xv. 45, 47. And all worship that is not governed and supported wholly in the *name of CHRIST*, is *will-worship*. Col. ii. 10, 23. iii. 17. GOD calls the covenant he made with Abraham in Gen. xvii, *The covenant of circumcision*. Acts vii. 8. But deceitful men took away that name, and called it the covenant of grace; from whence came the doctrine, that dominion is founded in grace, and for many ages things were so managed that natural affection, education, temporal interest, and self-righteousness, the strongest prejudices in the world, all conspired to bind people in that way, and to bar their minds against equal liberty, and believers baptism. And from thence only can we account for the following things.

THE first Baptist church in America, was constituted at Providence in 1639, the second at Newport in 1644; in which year a law was made at Boston, to banish any person who should dispute against infant baptism. Three years after Mr. Cotton owned that some did so, who yet did “not deny magistrates, nor predestination, nor original sin: nor maintain free-will in conversion, nor apostacy from grace; but only denied the lawful use of baptism of children, because it wanteth a word both of commandment and example from scripture.” He also owned that a main principle of purity and reformation is this, “That no duty of God’s worship, nor any ordinance of religion, is to be administered in the church, but such as hath a just warrant from the word of GOD.” But said he, “By  
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urging this argument against the baptism of children, Satan transformeth himself into an angel of light." \*

A Synod met at Cambridge the next year, who in their platform declared it to be the duty of magistrates to put forth their *coercive power against schismatics*; and by such power, three Baptist ministers were imprisoned at Boston, and one of them was cruelly scourged in 1651. For this a letter of reproof was sent from London; in answer to which Mr. Cotton said, "Do you think the LORD hath crowned the State with so many victories, that they should suffer so many miscreants to pluck the crown of sovereignty from CHRIST's head!—Thus CHRIST, by easing England of the yoke of a kingdom, shall forfeit his own kingdom among the people of England." † Mr. Dunster, president of Harvard-College, was put upon such a search into these matters, as brought him, in 1653, openly to preach against infant baptism; and when Mr. Mitchel, Minister of Cambridge, went to talk with him, scruples were raised in his mind about that practice; but he soon concluded that they came from the EVIL ONE, and said,

"It made me fearful to go needlessly to Mr. Dunster; for methought I found a *venom* and *poison*, in his insinuations and discourses against pedobaptism.—I *resolved* also, on Mr. Hooker's principle, that I would have an argument able to remove a mountain, before I would recede from, or appear against, a truth or practice received among the faithful." And in a dispute, appointed by authority in Boston, April 14 and 15, 1668, he took those words of Moses, *The man that will do presumptuously, and will not hearken unto*

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\* Cotton on baptism. 1647. p. 3.

† Hutchinson's History, vol. 3. p. 405;

unto the Priest, or unto the Judge, even that man shall die, and applied them to the leaders of the Baptist church in Boston ; in consequence of which a sentence of banishment was passed against three of them. But, eleven days before the time set for its execution, Mitchel was suddenly taken out of the world, \* yet, dear sir, in your introduction, you have set up his *resolution* for infant baptism, as a pattern for all to follow.

IN 1679 a Synod at Boston, declared that the Baptists had set up their posts by God's posts, which moved the court to nail up their meeting-house doors ; to justify which, teachers said, " Our famous Cotton was another Moses, in respect of meekness and christian forbearance, as to dissenters from *his judgment* in matters of lesser concernment ; yet would he sometimes make a zealous protestation, that if magistrates in New-England should tolerate transgressors against the rules of *godliness*, (as well as offences contrary to what the rules of *honesty* require,) he believed that God would not long tolerate them." † From whence we may see, that *their judgments* were put in the place of the decisions anciently made by God's laws, under the direction of the Urim and Thummim upon the high priest's breast. This they called *godliness*, although under that name many things have been acted, from that day to this, which God himself never could do : As,

1st. He never can act *inconsistently*. 2 Tim. ii. 13. but how often have men done it under his name !  
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\* These and many other facts, are clearly proved, in *A Church History of New-England*, from its first plantation down to the last Summer. in two volumes ; which may be had at Mr. Freeman's in Union Street, Boston, for 18s. of the second volume only for 9s.

† Preface to *Willard's Answer to Russell*, p. 4.



Those who formed our new constitution of government, declared that "Religion must at all times be a matter between God and individuals;" and yet many of them are tenacious of infant baptism and parish lines; though the first is forcing children into the church, before they can chuse for themselves, and the other is empowering some to force others into covenant with religious teachers. How much blood and treasure has lately been expended for *freedom*, by men who are for building the church upon a covenant which admitted none but children of Abraham's *flesh*, unless they would become *servants bought for money*! And on the day when a door was first opened for *strangers* to come in upon the profession of their own faith, all were required to bring their male children and servants, both to circumcision and the passover. Exod. xii. 44—48. From whence Mr. Cotton took his strongest argument for infant Baptism, saying, "If our LORD's supper comes in the room of the passover, and our baptism in the room of circumcision, look as he that had not circumcised his males, was accounted as one uncircumcised himself, and so to be debarred from the passover, so he who hath not baptized his children is accounted of God, as not baptized himself, and so to be debarred from the LORD's supper." \*

Sixty years after Mr. Stoddard took the same argument, to prove that the LORD's supper is a converting ordinance, and that all baptized persons, who are not scandalous, ought to come to it. And, not less than thirty pamphlets have been published within these twenty years, among your own denomination, upon the question, Whether sanctifying grace should be professed before persons come to the supper, or not?

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Each party accusing the other with inconsistency, and with favouring the cause of the Anabaptists; a name derived from a number of people in Germany, 250 years ago, who set up their own inventions in the place of divine institutions, and endeavoured to enforce them with the sword; yet the name is now cast upon our Baptist churches, for no better reason, than because they refuse to have any fellowship with such wickedness! Neither Peter nor Barnabas could keep up a distinction between *Jews by nature, and sinners of the Gentiles*, without *dissimulation*. Gal. ii. 13—15. Hence,

2d. God's promise, confirmed by an oath, are *two immutable things, in which it was impossible for him to lie* Heb. vi. 18. But four years after Boston was planted, the fathers of the Massachusetts presumed to absolve themselves from their promise and oath, not to make any laws contrary to the laws of England; and inserted the word *wholsome* in their new oath, instead of the word *lawful* in their old one; which, Mr. Cotton says, was done to guard against "Episcopal and malignant practices," and the first Baptist minister in America was banished for testifying against such exertions of power.\* Thereby the church assumed a tyranny over the world, for which they lost their charter in 1684; since which the world has tyrannized over the church, in a naked violation of their solemn oaths. Therefore I observe,

3d. THAT GOD cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. James i. 13. Yet under the name of *godliness*, many in this land are daily tempting others into the evils of bribery, adultery, and tyranny. For as long as rulers force away money from the people, and give it to religious teachers, it  
*bribes*

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\* Cotton's reply to Williams, p. 28.

*bribes* them to exert their influence for the increase of such power ; and this *bribes* rulers to continue in that practice ; whereby officers of church and state conspire together, to level the terrors both of this and a future world against those who *put not into their mouths*. And God says, *A gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous*. Deut. xvi. 19. Micah iii. 5, 11. The characters of men are therefore out of the present question, which is, not how many wise and righteous men have been thus blinded, but whether godliness requires the continuance of this blindness among us ? And for any to profess to be married to Christ, before they are made *dead* to sin and self righteousness, is *adultery* ; and so it is for any church to refuse to be content with all the temporal comforts which his authority and influence will procure, and to go after others therefor. Rom vii. 3—6. Hosea ii. 5, 8. Going after the kings of the earth for these comforts, has been the practice of the *mother of harlots*. Rev. xviii. 9. The covenant of circumcision, as it was first given to Abraham, admitted none into the church, but by natural descent by *blood*, or a purchase for *money* ; and it promised that *kings* should come out of him ; all which were types of King Jesus, and of his saints who are purchased by his blood and renewed by his spirit, whereby they become a *holy* and a *royal priesthood*. 1 Pet. i. 23. ii. 5, 9. But mystery Babylon was built by *confounding* type and antitype, carnal and spiritual together in these respects. The Devil himself is not more expressly excluded from a right to *power* in the christian church, than *blood* and *money* are. John i. 12, 13. Acts viii. 19—21. It was a *sorcerer* that first offered money for that end ; and by such *sorceries* all nations have been deceived, by her who has made merchandize of *slaves and souls of men* Rev. xviii. 13, 23. And our only security against ruin from her galleys and

and gallant ships, is to have our future worship governed entirely by the *words of God's book*, and not by the *precepts of men*. *Isai. xxix. 13, 18. xxxiii 21, 22.* The worst tyranny in the world, has sprung from empowering some to judge for others about worship, and to enforce their judgments with the sword. And if foreign aid might be called in to enforce such measures, we should be a ruined people. From 1692, to 1728, such worship was supported in the Massachusetts in the king's name, without any act to exempt Baptists or Quakers therefrom: And then an act was passed, which equalled Pharaoh in one point, and exceeded him in two others. He consented to release the persons of those he had oppressed, but to retain their property; and in that act polls only were exempted, and not estates. Pharaoh said, *Go not very far away*; the Massachusetts limited said exemption to five miles from the meeting place of each society; of whom they required a list upon oath or solemn affirmation; in which two points they exceeded the tyrant of Egypt. In 1744, said taxing power in Connecticut, held a teacher in Canterbury pulpit, against the vote of the church; and for worshipping with the church you belonged to, in a house separate from the parish meeting house, you and your brother were expelled from Yale College. This you know was the beginning of our separate churches; yet how many are daily tempting others into the above described bribery, adultery and tyranny!—Only for refusing to build christian worship upon the covenant of circumcision, a minister in our State lately accused the Baptist churches of “renouncing the *only* covenant which ever subsisted between God and his people.” † With whom a noted Minister in *Con-*  
*necticut*

*neetics* joined, and said to them, "When you re-baptise those in adult years, that we have baptized in their infancy, you and they jointly renounce that Father, Son and Holy Ghost, whom we adore and worship, and on whom we depend for *all our salvation*."\*

Thus matters are now brought to the same point as they were before the destruction of *Jerusalem*: Shedding of blood, in circumcision and in sacrifices, was an incumbent duty, until CHRIST came and shed his blood for us: after which, circumcision was tolerated for a time. But when it was insisted upon as necessary to salvation, the testimony was given to the churches, that if ye be circumcised, CHRIST shall profit you nothing. Gal. v. 2. And sacrifices were compared to murder and idolatry. And it was said, *Ye shall leave your name for a curse unto my chosen; for the Lord God shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name*. Which prophecy is applied to the gainsaying Jews, when the Gentiles came in. Isa. lxxv. 1, 2, 15. lxxvi. 3. Rom. x. 20, 21. Hence the name Christian, which signifies Christ-like, was first given to the believing Gentiles at Antioch. Acts x. 26. And in evident reference to that name, it is said, If any man have not the *spirit of Christ*, he is none of his; but is *in the flesh*, where he cannot please God. Rom. viii. 8, 9. Yet the above authors deny that we can consistently allow persons of your persuasion to be visible christians, unless we will own that they were made such by ministers, before they knew any thing of that spirit. This is so opposite to truth, that by the fruits of the spirit the Israelites were a visible and glorious church of God when they came out of the wilderness, though none who were born therein were circumcised, until  
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he rolled away the reproach of Egypt at Gilgal. Josh. v. 9. And may a like blessing be speedily granted to all his people !

You, Sir, have discovered a very fruitful invention, in your attempts to prove, that the face represents the whole man, and that washing ought to be upon the naked skin : but seem to have forgotten, that baptism is not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ ; unto whom none *can come* but by being *taught of God* ; which is the meaning of the name *Disciple*, the only proper subjects of baptism. John vi. 44, 45. Matt. xxviii. 19. All gospel means should be used to promote children's coming to him ; but some evidence that they have come, ought to go before baptism.

THESE things are referred to your serious consideration ; and if you can see any mistake therein, please to discover it, to your hearty friend,

Isaac Backus.

*Middleborough, January 31, 1785.*

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