

Baptism and the Covenants

March 3, 2019

Part 1: Concerning Paedobaptism

Question 74: Heidelberg Catechism

Q. Should infants, too, be baptized?

A. Yes. For they as well as adults belong to God's covenant and community (Gen. 17:7) and no less than adults are promised forgiveness of sin through Christ's blood (Matt. 19:14) and the Holy Spirit, who produces faith (Ps. 22:10; Is. 44:1–3; Luke 1:15; Acts 2:39; 16:31).

Therefore, they, too, ought to be incorporated into the Christian church by baptism, the sign of the covenant, and distinguished from the children of unbelievers (Acts 10:47; 1 Cor. 7:14). This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision (Gen. 17:9–14), in whose place baptism was instituted in the New Testament (Col. 2:11–13).

Rom 4:7-12 "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; (8) blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin." (9) Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. (10) How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. (11) He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, (12) and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

A question to consider is this: Circumcision is defined here as “a seal of the righteousness that he had **by faith**”. And, yet, infants received circumcision under the Old Covenant – before coming to faith. Should the same apply to the New Covenant today – i.e. should all in the household of believers received baptism – prior to coming to faith?

Part 2: Recall what we have discussed concerning the Old and New Covenants

1. The Old Covenant is not like the New Covenant. It is new in kind – not new in administration.
From Scripture:
 - a. The Old Covenant was faulty – the New Covenant is faultless.
 - b. The Old Covenant was a ministry of death – the New Covenant is a ministry of life.
 - c. The Old Covenant saved no one – the New Covenant saves everyone.
 - d. Scripture reveals that it did not annul the promises made to Abraham – the New Covenant fulfills those promises.
 - e. It was temporary and passed away – the New Covenant is permanent.
2. The New Covenant is better
 - a. Better mediator: Christ
 - b. Better terms: the Spirit writes the law on covenant members' hearts to cause them to walk in His statutes and obey His rules.
 - c. Everyone in the New Covenant “knows” the Lord – i.e. intimate saving knowledge
 - d. The New Covenant cannot be broken

Consider that a new covenant, not like the one, can very easily have a different sign, a different set of members, and a different administration. While similarities may exist, we must keep in mind that the New Covenant is not a continuation of the Old Covenant.

Part 3: Entering the Covenant: Old vs New:

Entrance into the Old Covenant was physical:

Gen 17:10-13: This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. (11) You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. (12) He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, (13) both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant.

Entrance into the New Covenant is spiritual:

Rom 2:28-29 For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. (29) But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

Col 2:11-12 In him also **you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands**, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, (12) **having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith** in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Part 3: Physical circumcision did not equal spiritual circumcision

Deu 10:16: Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart and be no longer stubborn.

Jer 4:4: Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it, because of the evil of your deeds."

In his farewell address, Moses anticipated the truth of this in providing this promise:

Deu 30:6 And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

But consider that this promise is the result of their falling away:

Deu 30:1-3 "And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, (2) and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, (3) then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you.

Part 4: Circumcision was not replaced by baptism

Php 3:2-7: Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. (3) **For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh--** (4) though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: (5) circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; (6) as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. (7) But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

1Co 7:18: Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision.

Gal 6:15: For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

Consider that in all of these passages, along with the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, there is no mention of baptism taking the place of circumcision. If Judaizers are maintaining that you must be circumcised to be saved, it seems that explaining a different administration of the sign of the covenant would have been key to differentiating New Covenant behavior.

Part 5: Conclusions

1. Different covenants are different with different signs: the Noahic had a rainbow; the Old Covenant had circumcision; the New Covenant has baptism.
2. Different covenants have different members: the Noahic had all mankind and animals; the Old Covenant had entire households; the New Covenant has all who are in Christ.
3. Paul realized that in Christ, all of his “benefits” under the Old Covenant came to nothing.
4. Scripture has many opportunities to point to baptism taking the place of circumcision but does not do so. The argument, then, that circumcision has been replaced by baptism is an argument from silence.
5. We will see next time the same is true for Scriptural support for baptism of infants and communion of infants – there is none.

Next Week:

1. Candidates for baptism
2. Mode of baptism
3. Meaning of baptism