

The New vs the Old (3rd)

(In our discussion today, we begin to see some of the basic doctrines that are different due to the views of the Old and New Covenants. Many of these differences are very fundamental to the overall interpretation of the Scriptures concerning these doctrines.)

Since there is a fundamental difference between the Baptists and the reformers regarding the covenant, what doctrines are involved due to this difference? Some of the basic subjects are the family, baptism, the Lord's Supper, ecclesiology (doctrine of the church), and the relationship of civil government to the church. Naturally, some of these topics are interrelated and involved other subjects in secondary ways. For example, liberty of conscience is affected by more than one of the doctrines listed above.

With the belief that the New Testament is an extension of the Old, it was maintained by the reformers that the New was linked and related to the Old by the rite of circumcision. In attempt to answer objections to infant baptism, Calvin gives the following:

In order to gain a stronger footing here, they (objectors of infant baptism—JKB) add, that baptism is a sacrament of penitence and faith, and as neither of these is applicable to tender infancy, we must beware of rendering its meaning empty and vain, by admitting infants to the communion of baptism. But these darts are directed more against God than against us; since the fact that circumcision was a sign of repentance is completely established by many passages of Scripture (Jer. iv. 4). Thus Paul terms it a seal of the righteousness of faith (Rom. iv. 11). Let God, then, be demanded why he ordered circumcision to be performed on the bodies of infants? For baptism and circumcision being here in the same case, they cannot give anything to the latter without conceding it to the former. If they recur to their usual evasion, that, by the age of infancy, spiritual infants were then figured, we have already closed this means of escape against them. We say, then, that since God imparted circumcision, the sign of repentance and faith, to infants, it should not seem absurd that they are now made partakers of baptism, unless men choose to clamour against an institution of God. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 2, Book IV, Chapter XVI, para., 20 (pp. 542-543 in my set).

Jeremiah 4:4, Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskin of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

Romans 4:11, And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that the righteousness might be imputed unto them also:

There are several things in this quote that needs to be addressed later. However, I will briefly mention some now. One is the subject of sacrament. The reformers insist in calling baptism and the Lord's Supper (and also other things, at times) sacraments. Baptists simply maintain that they are ordinances (rules, laws, regulations) given by God for believers and they are not some mysterious means of grace to benefit those who participate in them. Second, the Scriptures speak of repentance, but not of penitence. Third, the Scriptures do not affirm that "circumcision was a sign of repentance." Romans 4:11 tells us that circumcision was a "seal of the righteousness of the faith which he

(Abraham) had” in uncircumcision. It was never stated as such to anyone else as assumed by Calvin and the reformers. Fourth, Calvin spoke of God demanding “circumcision to be performed on the bodies of infants.” This, too, is misleading. God only demanded circumcision to be performed on males. Females were never included in the rite of circumcision in the Scriptures. In any case, I only gave this quote to show that the reformers link or connect circumcision and baptism. Remember that in the passage quoted, Calvin said, “For baptism and circumcision being here in the same case, they cannot give anything to the latter without conceding it to the former.” Calvin was making the connection with his reference to Romans 4:11.

This connection is why the reformers maintain that children of believing parents are in the covenant and/or kingdom and thereby come under the umbrella of the church. Under the subheading of “Baptism as a Duty,” Charles Hodge said the following in his *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, pp 587-588:

Membership in the visible Church is not only a great honour, it a great advantage. ... Every one admits that it is a blessing to be born in a Christian, instead of in a heathen land. It is no less obviously true that it is a blessing to be within the pale of the Church and not cast out into the world. It is good to have the vows of God upon us. It is good to be under the watch and care of the people of God. It is good to have a special claim upon their prayers and upon their efforts to bring us into, or keep us in the paths of salvation. And above all, it is good to be of the number of those to whom God has made a special promise of grace and salvation. For the promise is unto us and to our children. It is a great evil to be “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise.” They, therefore, sin against God and their own souls who neglect the command to be baptized in the name of the Lord; and those parents sin grievously against the souls of their children who neglect to consecrate them to God in the ordinance of baptism. Do let the little ones have their names written in the Lamb’s book of life, even if they afterwards choose to erase them. Being thus enrolled may be the means of their salvation.

The Scriptures are clear in showing that baptism is not a mystery of some means of grace. I Peter 3:21 says, “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also save us (not the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:” This plainly states that baptism is a figure (i.e., it is a picture or a type). Just like the ark in which Noah and his family were delivered from the flood was a picture or figure of how we are saved by the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, so is baptism a picture of the same thing. Therefore, when Jesus was baptized by John and He said, “for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness,” it was being done in a picture (figure or type).

Remember, Charles Hodge also believed “the five points of Calvinism.” However, what one believes regarding one doctrine greatly influences his beliefs in all other doctrines. Therefore, it is important that we believe the truth of the Scriptures to avoid contradictions in our overall theology. Equally, this shows the importance of knowing the difference between what Baptists believe from that of the reformers. Yes, there are many similarities between Baptists and reformers, but there are some fundamental differences which separate the two groups. The Lord willing, we will discuss some of these in more detail as we go forward.