

Continuity and Discontinuity, Old and New

When analyzing baptism, we can analyze this question by embedding it into a wider perspective, namely that of the covenant. Dispensationalism classically holds that since God has two people, then we must formulate a tradition based on which we can divide the Word of truth between God's two people. Furthermore, this brand of theology posits a number of different dispensations of the means of God's salvation which differ from epoch to epoch. According to some dispensationalists, the Jews are saved by keeping the law. This openly contradicts the Gospel of salvation by faith alone, by grace alone, and by Christ alone, and is a Judaizing heresy. We can quickly "dispense" with dispensationalism in that it is obvious that God has only one people throughout Scripture (Acts 7:38); the body of Christ cannot be cut into two or more pieces (1Cor. 12:12-27). Furthermore, since the Bible is the sole highest authority, we must dispense with any sort of principle by which we feign to "divide the Word of truth", as dispensationalists claim.

Baptists and dispensationalists claim that based on the New covenant (the New Testament dispensation), the Old covenant has been done away with entirely, and thus instead of circumcising infants (paedocircumcision), we have baptism of believers only (credobaptism). This they do based on Hebrews 8, which is cited here in its entirety:

"Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer. For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law: Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount. But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away."

We should not here go into hyperbole, since this chapter of the Bible does not mention an entirely new covenant, *de novo* (out of nothing). To do so would mean breaking the continuity of the Old and New Testament completely. Genesis 17: 7-10 contradicts this, in that the covenant that God made with

Abraham, the covenant of grace (which preceded the covenant made with Moses at Mount Sinai where Moses received the Law):

“And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised.”

This means that there is one covenant, preserved between the Old and the New Testaments; there are similarities and dissimilarities; continuity and discontinuity. In other words, there are elements of the Old Testament which are retained, and some dispensed with. This is because elements of the covenant in the Old Testament only foreshadowed Christ, Who was to fulfill the Law when He came at the beginning of the New Testament. The shadows have been done away with, because the Real One has come Who is so much more better. This is the message of Hebrews 8. Jesus Christ did not do away with the Old Testament laws, in fact he made them much stricter. For example, in His words, not only did lying down with another man’s wife count as fornication, but also even if you look with lust towards a woman.

Following is a list of some of the elements of the covenant in the Old Testament which changed in the New Testament:

Old Testament	New Testament
Animal sacrifices	Discontinued
Temple in Jerusalem	The people of God is the temple
Facing towards Jerusalem during prayer	Discontinued
Ceremonial laws	Discontinued
Holy Spirit in church officers	Holy Spirit in all believers
Circumcision of baby boys only	Baptism

The question here then is, do the recipients of baptism change with respect to those of circumcision? Credobaptists have to show without a shadow of a doubt that the recipients have indeed changed. There is no clear mention or command which supports this. Rather, we have Bible verses which support the idea that the recipients have stayed the same:

“Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized 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 unto you, and to your children**, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call.” (Acts 2:38-39)

“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.**” (1Cor. 7:14)

“And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; **and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.**” (Acts 16:33)