

Colossians 2:11-15 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, <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, <sup>14</sup> by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

## Colossians 2:11-15 | Christ of the Covenants

Paul presented the heart of his argument for the letter to the Colossian's in the text last week which can be summarized just by quoting him;

Colossians 2:6 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him.

This is the central point of the book. The rest of this section of Paul's letter unfolds like supporting premises for this one main exhortation for the Colossians to hold fast to Christ and resist all that does not hold Christ as Lord.

In this section Paul is really seeking to build up the antibodies of the young Colossian church so that they hold fast to Christ alone and are not deceived into submission to any other religious or political system. This section gives us these supporting arguments for Paul's exhortation to hold fast to Christ and not be deceived by any alternative. These reasons are seeing that Christ has given you his promises, freed you from sin, removed your accuser and triumphed over your enemies.

### 1. Covenant

Colossians 2:11 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,

In the background of this exhortation we can hear what many of the new Christian converts were likely hearing from those surrounding them. In order to fully apprehend the promises of God they would need to go all the way and become physically circumcised as well. This dynamic plagued most of the early Christian churches and the reason makes sense. Christ came to fulfill the promises of God to his people as given to us in the Old Testament. And the marker of God's chosen people, and of God's promises in the Old Testament was circumcision.

Paul in fact himself is a Jewish man who was circumcised on the eighth day following his birth according to the old testament scriptures. You can imagine a tenderhearted young Christian, who is gaining understanding of the promises that he has received in Christ becoming easily persuaded that he must mark himself out as a member of God's chosen people. But Paul is saying to this young church that they have in fact received something far greater than circumcision. He calls it "Christian circumcision," or translated here the "circumcision of Christ."

The Circumcision of Christ was accomplished by Christ when he took on our flesh and was cut off and bloodied on the cross. This was the real thing of which circumcision was only a shadow or a pointer. This is applied to our hearts, without hands as in a minor surgery, but by the work of his Spirit in disrobing the sinful flesh which deforms our hearts twisting us away from the Lord. How did the Colossians receive this?

Colossians 2:12 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.

Paul then reminds the Colossians of the sign which they received of the new covenant. The sign of baptism. How is it that the Colossians were "circumcised without hands" by "having been buried with him in baptism." Paul is making clear here that baptism has taken the place of the sign of circumcision. One a bloody right of cleansing, the other a purifying right of cleansing. One a sign of what was to come, the other a sign of what has already been fulfilled. One a marker of promises made the other their fulfillment.

Imagine what this might mean to a Jew like Paul who had always been taught that God was saving a people for himself. These people were marked by God as the Jews through circumcision. But now Paul sees, that God was making a people for himself, but these are not marked as a particular ethnicity through circumcision, but Jew and Greek, shown as members of the covenant community by their baptism into Christ. This likewise teaches us something about baptism. As it is replacing the old sign of the covenant it is not retreating in its administration but expanding. The sign and seal is given to believers and to their children.

But this is not to say that baptism operates in a magical way, as if it can be applied like an effective spell, but rather that God has given us this sign and seal so that we might take up by faith, in to our persons and our communities the promises that he has given us.

This faith is not a vague faith but a faith in this object which Christ shows us, the powerful working of God in his raising Christ from the dead. Paul is saying to the Colossians, "do not be deceived by those who are trying to make additions to Christ. You have the circumcision without hands. Remember your baptism into Christ.

Let me finish here. One night I got into an argument with my wife. To understand our marriage you must know that her feet are firmly planted on the ground and my head is firmly fixed in the clouds. Occasionally these differences flair, usually around the time Maegan is ready to go to sleep. One day I thought, maybe I should give up on trying to share things I thought were interesting, and perhaps there could be a part of my life I would just keep cordoned off. But Maegan said this, “remember we are in covenant together, I want to know you even if it is hard that is what we are in covenant to do.” Take hold of your baptism into Christ by faith. It means that you are in covenant with him, and by holding fast in faith to that you will know him.

## 2. Forgiveness

Colossians 2:13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,

Paul actually says “and you” twice in this sentence. So we ought to receive it as such. He is calling the Colossians to internalize and personalize these truths. Even you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh.

These two qualities are first meant to show us that we are helpless in our sin. The sin which alienates us from the God of life plunges us spiritually into death. This is the reality of the gospel that we could not save ourselves and God saved us. But not only were we bound in our sin, we were uncircumcised which means we were outside of the community who held the promises of God for salvation. We had no hope and were without God in the world.

Some of you will not find it difficult to consider this level of hopelessness because it might be a close friend. You are frequently reminded that no one really has your back and to be without God in the world is to know that no one really has your back. That is uncircumcision dead in sin. But it is you, who God made alive together and the first move in making you alive together with Christ is forgiveness.

There is nothing in your life which God cannot forgive in Christ. There is no amount of denial, or cruelty, or sexual immorality, or laziness, or wickedness that Christ’s blood is not sufficient to cleanse completely. You need nothing else, no circumcision, none of your own righteousness, no approval of any person in the world, you need only Christ. Let us gaze upon our forgiveness. How did God forgive?

## 3. Freedom

Colossians 2:14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

What is this record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands? Paul is so cutting and ironic in his speech, because he is referring to the Old Testament law here as just a handwritten note. But consider the law of God affords us sinners no righteousness. It only reveals the wickedness of our hearts and makes plain the depths of our sin. Well that whole record of debt, all of your sins, are set aside. They have been set aside by having been nailed to the cross.

Notice that Paul's earlier "you," transformed here into an "us." Because the gentile uncircumcised "you" weren't in the covenant community that had the law. But having the law is no help in overcoming sin. Paul includes himself because we all can only be freed from our unrighteousness by the substitution of Christ.

Paul continues on, as to why to hold fast to Christ and reminds us of Christ's absolute position as Lord of all. I want you to understand that there is no neutral position in the world. Our rebellion against God is agreement with Satan. And our agreement with Satan is submission to him and all the authorities which he designs to enslave us. But these God disarmed through Christ.

Colossians 2:15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

There is a Roman backdrop to this, in which a conquered nation would be stripped and lead through a city to show the triumph of the nation of Rome. Paul is coopting this image to describe what Christ did to the demonic rulers and authorities, and likewise to the worldly authorities of Judaism (the most advanced religious system in the world) and Rome (The most advanced political system in the world). But how did Jesus disarm, put to shame, and triumph?

Disarm is more literally translated, disrobe. Christ disrobed the rulers and authorities on our behalf by being disrobed himself. His cloak was sold in one piece. He was put to open shame, because cursed is anyone who is nailed to a cross. And he was triumphed over, as a sarcastic announcement was placed over his head, "behold the king of the Jews." And all of this was accomplishing its opposite.

In his death we find our life. Remember your baptism. Hold fast by faith to the cross. You are utterly freed in Christ.