

**“The Significance of Baptism”**  
**Colossians 2:11-15**  
**September 22, 2024 | Mercy Hill Church**

**Big Idea:** *Baptism is a symbol of our death, burial and resurrection with Christ – our union with Christ. It is an expression of our faith in Jesus and His work – not ours. Baptism does not save – only Jesus can and does!*

**Overview of Colossians**

- Written by the Apostle Paul - Colossians was a church plant started by Epaphras, not Paul – to the Colossian Church at Colosse, a cosmopolitan area located in Asia Minor. It was once a great city that was devastated by an earthquake ~60-61 A.D. Written ~60-62 AD while Paul was imprisoned in Rome, where Paul also wrote Philippians and Philemon.
- Written to the Colossian church in response to false teaching (syncretism) which mixed the Christian faith, Jewish faith and pagan beliefs. Letter appears to address more the gentile (non-Jewish) believers, even though there was a significant Jewish believer population in Colossae
- Consequently, the theme of the letter is about Christ: the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus. Going back to the gospel, the centrality of Christ and the finality of His authority
- Jesus + Nothing = Everything. Everything – Jesus = Nothing.

**Context of Colossians 2:6-15**

- Vv.6-7 An encouragement to continue walking in faith, staying rooted and grounded in the Gospel
- V.8 Why? A warning to not be taken captive by the syncretism, philosophies around the world that is against Jesus
- Vv.9-10 Why? Jesus is enough, Jesus is sufficient. Don't need Jesus + something else!

**1. Baptism: A Symbol of Our (Deserving) Death (vv.11-12a, 13a, 14a)**

- V.12a, 13a – “having been buried with him in baptism”, “and you, who were dead in your trespasses”
- Romans 6:3 <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?
- **Due to Our Sin** (cf. Romans 6:23, James 4:17)
  - Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death...”
  - Sins of Commission & Sins of Omission
    - James 4:17: So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.
    - Sin isn't just doing something wrong, against God – but it's also neglecting to do what is good and right.
  - Illustration: Grading on a Curve vs. Straight Scale
    - Sin isn't relative – God doesn't grade on a curve, or in comparison to others, but on a straight scale. Sin is always defined in relation to God's absolute holiness and goodness, not relative or in comparison to others
    - 10 Commandments aren't just arbitrary commands but reflect the nature and character of God.
  - As sinful people, our tendency is to justify, minimize or ignore our sin – and sometimes even distort or manipulate God's Word to excuse or justify our sin.
    - Recent Tragic Example: Dr. Vince Bantu, seminary professor, accountability & polygamy in Christianity Today ([link](#))

- **Circumcision: “Cutting Off”**
- **Circumcision in the OT:** “Circumcision is the covenantal sign of God’s people as they were separated from those around them” (cf. Gen 17:9-14)
- But here in v.11, the Apostle Paul is not referring to physical circumcision but a, “circumcision made without hands...”
  - **Quote:** “The cutting away of the foreskin of the flesh denoted God’s promise to cut off covenant breakers from His presence, His people, and His blessing...Simultaneously, the sign of circumcision represented the cutting away of the filth of the fallen, sinful human nature.”
  - OT References
    - **Deut 30:6** <sup>6</sup> 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.
    - **Leviticus 26:40-42** <sup>40</sup> “But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me, and also in walking contrary to me, <sup>41</sup> so that I walked contrary to them and brought them into the land of their enemies—if *then their uncircumcised heart* is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity, <sup>42</sup> then I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and I will remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.
    - **Jeremiah 4:3-4** <sup>3</sup> For thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: “Break up your fallow ground,  
and sow not among thorns.  
<sup>4</sup> *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.”
  - “Cutting off” or “putting off” sin
  - **Quote:** “Circumcision, like the Passover, also served as a blood sign of the gospel. Blood had to be shed if God was going to justly cut away the corruption of fallen human nature. This points to the blood of Christ as the fulfillment of that which circumcision typified in the old covenant. Circumcision pointed to the need for the bloodshed of Jesus. Significantly, Jesus first shed blood when He was circumcised on the eighth day (see [Luke 2:21](#)). This was part of the redemptive-historical nature of the covenant sign of circumcision. It signified that for which Christ had come into the world.”
- V.13a “dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh”
- **Garland Quote:** “In the NT, *baptism is more connected to death than washing*. In Mark 10:38-39, Jesus uses the image of baptism for his death and says that it is something his disciples can and will share. *Baptism becomes a performative visual aid in which we symbolically reenact Christ’s death and resurrection*. In baptism we voluntarily accept God’s judgment on our sin and the sentence of death but we do not die alone. We die with Christ, who died for us...Baptism marks a break with the past. We die to the old – the old ways of living...in baptism we repudiate our sinful members (3:5).”
- Baptism: physical act of being lowered (or dunked) into the water => judgment, death. While in other parts of the Bible we see water as cleansing (purifying, washing) and even in a positive manner (re: Jesus as the Living Water)...

- Going down into the water, being immersed in the water, is a symbol of God's judgment and wrath because of our sin. It's a symbol of God's judgement (re: Noah's Ark, crossing of the Red Sea) and our deserving spiritual death due to our sin.
- When a person gets baptized, they are confessing and acknowledging that they are deserving of God's judgment – they recognize, acknowledge and confess their sins and sinfulness and that they have fallen short of God's glory. It's also a symbol of dying to our old self...

## 2. Baptism: A Symbol of Our (Underserved) New Life (vv.12b, 13b)

- Like two-sides of a coin, on one side of baptism, it's a symbol of (deserving) death, but the other side of baptism is also symbol of our new (undeserved) new life in Christ
- As our sinful, old self "dies", we are raised, resurrected, given new life!
  - Upgrade: no longer 1.0 but the completely, new and improved 2.0 version. A whole new operating system!
    - Romans 6:3-5: <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, *just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.* <sup>5</sup> For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.
- New life, new creation – "born again"
  - 2 Cor 5:17 <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.
  - Ephesians 4:22-24 <sup>22</sup> to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, <sup>23</sup> and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, <sup>24</sup> and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.
  - Ezekiel 36:26 <sup>26</sup> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.
- JC Ryle Quote: "To be born again is, as it were, to enter upon a new existence, to have a new mind, a new heart, new views, new principles, new tastes, new affections, new likings, new dislikings, new fears, new joys, new sorrows, new love to things once hated, new hatred to things once loved, new thoughts of God, and ourselves, and the world, and the life to come, and salvation."
- Witness Protection Illustration: You've been given a new identity, a new start, a new life.
- On one hand, baptism symbolizes a death and an end, but it also *symbolizes* a new birth, a new life, a new beginning!

## 3. Baptism: A Symbol of Our Faith in Jesus (vv.12b, 13b-15)

- How is this all possible? V.12b – "*through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him (Jesus) from the dead*"
- Baptism is an outward demonstration or expression of an inward faith. Being baptized doesn't save you – nor does not being baptized condemn you.
- **Not faith in our works – or even in the act of baptism -- but trust in Jesus' work: His sacrifice on the cross (vv.14-15)**
  - Romans 10:9 because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, *you will be saved*
- Throughout the story of the OT and throughout human history is our natural propensity to try to save ourselves or seek salvation, peace, hope and purpose in other things
  - V.11 – "you were circumcised with a circumcision *made without human hands..*"

- Contrast with idols – *made by human hands*
    - Isaiah 31:7 For in that day everyone shall cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold, which *your hands have sinfully made* for you.
    - Acts 17:24-25 The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples *made by man*, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.
  - Each person getting baptized this morning acknowledges and recognizes that it's not because of how good they are, how many times they've read the Bible or gone to church.
  - The only people deserving of God's grace and mercy are those who recognize they are not deserving of God's grace and mercy
- Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross (vv.13-15)
  - 1) Forgiveness and cancelling the debt...nailing it to the cross (vv.13b-14a) – the sufficiency of Jesus
    - Penal Substitutionary Atonement – in order for our sin to be dealt with, someone – only Jesus – must be our substitute and take on the penalty (consequence) our sin deserves. Our faith is grounded in what Jesus has done on the cross!
  - 2) Jesus conquered all other rulers and authorities (v.15) – the supremacy of Jesus
    - “Christus Victor” – “is the element of the atoning work of Christ that emphasizes the triumph of Christ over the evil powers of the world, through which he rescues his people and establishes a new relationship between God and the world...the themes of the victory of God in Christ over the evil powers of the world, mainly Satan. By defeating the evil powers that oppose God, Jesus Christ rescued his people from Satan and established himself as the rightful king of the cosmos” (TGC article)
    - Illustration: Roman Conqueror | | Championship Parades
  - Our forgiveness and freedom (from sin, to follow Jesus)
  - Romans 6:6-14 <sup>6</sup>We know that our old self was crucified *with him* in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. <sup>7</sup>For one who has died has been set free from sin. <sup>8</sup>Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live *with him*. <sup>9</sup>We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. <sup>10</sup>For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. <sup>11</sup>So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. <sup>12</sup>Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. <sup>13</sup>Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. <sup>14</sup>For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but *under grace*.
- **Union with Christ: "With Him," "In Him"** (from Constanin Campbell as cited by G.K. Beale's Union with the Resurrected Christ)
  - **“Participation”: Connection to Christ('s Work)** – in salvation, sanctification, glorification, adoption, etc.
    - What Christ has done for us!
      - Notice in this morning's passage who is the one doing, acting – God, not us!
        - V.11 – “you *were* circumcised with circumcision made without hands”
        - V.12 – “having *been* buried with him in baptism...you *were also raised* with him...”
        - V.13 – “*God made alive*...having *forgiven us*...”

- V.14 – “by cancelling the record of debt...*he set aside, nailing it to the cross...*
  - V.15 – “*He disarmed the rulers and authorities...put them to open shame*”
  - All passive verbs by us – God is the active one, God is the one at work –not us!
  - Parasite analogy
- **“Identification”: Allegiance to Jesus** – being disciples (following) of Jesus, our Savior *and Lord!*
  - Baptism, in our union with Christ, we also have a new identity, a new allegiance – we do the will of the Father
- **“Incorporation”: Joining the Body of Christ** - the church. The corporate or communal aspect.
  - Baptism, in our union with Christ, we also have a new community, a new family
    - Trinity: Father, Son, Holy Spirit
- Quote: Rankin Wilbourne’s “Union with Christ”
  - “Becoming a Christian means more than believing Christ did certain things for you long ago. It means that Christ joins his life to yours in such an intimate and comprehensive way that the prevailing metaphor for this union in the Bible is marriage (Eph 5:32)...and because of your union with Christ, these songs of “Extravagant Grace” and “Radical Discipleship” can no more be separated in your life than Christ himself can be torn in two. These two melodies meet in harmony in him in whom they have always met...
  - “By living in union with Him, we receive what John Calvin calls ‘a double grace.’ By double grace, he means (to use the Bible’s own words) that both justification and sanctification flow out of our union with Christ (1 Cor 1:30). To illustrate double grace, Calvin uses a picture from nature – the light and heat of the sun:
    - Christ, our righteousness, is the sun. Justification its light; sanctification its heat. The sun is at once the source of both such that its light and heat are inseparable. At the same time, only light illuminates and only heat warms, not the reverse. Both are always present, without the one becoming the other
  - ...so when we are united to this Jesus, we have full access to his amazing grace that covers us and we have full access to his power that enables us to obey his commands”
  - When you feel defeated or ensnared, like you are never going to get over this particular sin, habit or hang-up; when your enemy accuses you and your heart tells you to retreat in shame, you can rehearse and remember, “I am in Christ. I am one for whom he died.” The work of Christ sets you free from sin’s penalty. So rather than running away from God [Joey: and/or the people of God/the church], you can turn toward Christ precisely when you might be tempted to hide from him. You can boldly approach his throne with confidence because you remember you are completely covered by Christ’s righteousness. *Only those who believe can obey*
  - Christ in You: You are not left with your own resources. The obedient, powerful, merciful Jesus dwells within you. Christ in you is greater than anything that threatens you (1 John 4:4). The person of Christ sets you free from sin’s power. When it feels as though you are drowning in a sea of trouble, you don’t have to medicate your feelings or reach for solutions that might temporarily relieve but ultimately destroy you. You can choose instead to draw on Christ’s strength, and you will find that you are strengthened. You can take one step, even in the dark. You can make one new choice. You can hold on for one more minute. *Only those who obey can believe.*

- Baptism is an outward expression of our death, burial and resurrection with Jesus. Being dead in our sins, but being raised up, resurrected, || Jesus died on the cross for our sins, and was raised on the third day. It's not our work, our goodness, but our faith in who Jesus is and what He did. It's our union with Christ.

**Big Idea: *Baptism is a symbol of our death, burial and resurrection with Christ – our union with Christ. It is an expression of our faith in Jesus and His work – not ours. Baptism does not save – only Jesus can and does!***

#### **Reflection Questions**

- What common symbols do you see in our society? Which symbols have meaning or importance for you?
- How does this morning's passage help clarify for you what baptism is -- and isn't? What were some of the misconceptions you had about baptism?
- How does your "union with Christ" encourage you in your spiritual journey?
- If you have been baptized, how does this morning's passage remind, renew and encourage you in your faith this morning? If you haven't been baptized, what questions or obstacles hinder or prevent you from doing so?
- **Parent Corner:** What is your child's understanding of baptism? Where is your child at in her/his spiritual journey? What truths from this morning's passage can you share with your child(ren) this week as you teach, encourage and pray for your child's salvation?