

Becoming Spiritually Alive: Committing to Jesus

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At A Glance:

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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

Becoming Spiritually Alive

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: My Growing Understanding of Baptism

1. I've shared previously that I grew up in the church and in a Christian home. I was able to get baptized when I was thirteen years old. When I got baptized, I knew enough to know the commitment I was making. I also knew that getting baptized meant I was admitting my need for Jesus and testifying that I thought He has changed me. I knew all of this, or at least the basics of this.
2. As I look back twenty-seven years of following Jesus, I understand to a much deeper and richer degree, the commitment I made when I was baptized. A lot has happened that I didn't expect. God has changed me in ways that I didn't even know needed changing. He still is! As I've followed Jesus, my understanding of the significance of what is represented in my baptism has grown massively.
3. Jesus took me from a person who wanted to have fun playing sports and finding a job that would make lots of money so I could enjoy life to someone who enjoys life in a much deeper and different way through a life of service to Jesus and other people. I never would have imagined that I would be a pastor. When I started with Jesus, I wasn't even interested in spiritual things.
4. I'm sure there are many of you who could say the same thing. God has drastically changed you for the better.

B. Baptism, like marriage, is a matter of making a long-term commitment even though you don't know precisely how that commitment is going to play out. Even while lacking specifics, you are still making a commitment. Baptism requires courage. It takes courage to tell others that you are going to follow Jesus, even if you don't know where it will lead. Every disciple who gets baptized courageously makes this commitment as an act of obedience and faith. We will be looking at the two most important commitments connected to baptism.

II. Our Need for Baptism

- A. Paul is using different images to explain the same spiritual realities with the intent of encouraging the church of Colossae to rest in the sufficiency of Jesus alone (Col. 2:9-10)—the spiritual realities of salvation.¹ While some false teachers are trying to convince the church more is needed besides an uncomplicated trust in Jesus, the apostle encourages the church not to move away from their current attachment to Jesus since He provides everything they need to be spiritually healthy. When the church committed to following Jesus, His resources gave them what they need to live lives that please God. Something real happens when individuals choose to follow Jesus, and that is enough.
- B. In this context, the inner transformation reflected in baptism is explained. In baptism, what is seen (the person going into and coming out of the water) points to and communicates that

¹ Grant R. Osborne, [Colossians & Philemon: Verse by Verse](#), Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 73.

which is unseen—the work God has done inside the person. Notice how Paul says those who trust Jesus receive “a circumcision made without hands” (v. 11) and “the circumcision of Christ” (v. 11).² Baptism, in its truest sense, is “the working of God” (v. 12).³ This soul work of God is initiated in the presence of trust in Jesus as it is, “through faith” (v. 12). This work of God is then explained by using many passive verbs such as “you were”, “having been”, “He made”, and “He has,” which demonstrates the disciple is on the receiving end of God’s actions, which is expressed in baptism. This work of God both circumcises and baptizes a person into the people of God—initiates them into a new kind of life.

- C. The practice of water baptism is a physical enactment of a spiritual work that God performs in the lives of those who believe in Jesus.⁴ The primary focus of both circumcision and baptism is not the physical and external (the rite or actions being performed) but the spiritual and the internal (Rm. 2:28-29).⁵ Baptism here refers to the spiritual reality that water baptism metaphorically symbolizes.⁶ What happens on the outside is a reflection of what took place on the inside. This is why baptism was performed shortly after a person hears and responds to the message of Jesus (called the gospel) in the early church.
- D. Why do people need this work of God performed in their heart? Because every person’s spiritual condition before God is defined as, “When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh” (v. 13).⁷ Humanity’s default and natural disposition toward God is to be spiritually dead as they follow their own desires, which turn out not to be good; they don’t naturally produce the kind of lifestyle that pleases God. Paul summarizes this spiritual condition as, “²¹ And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, *engaged* in evil deeds,” (Col. 1:21).⁸ To be spiritually dead is to live a life separated from the influence and authority of God: “alienated”. It is to think in a manner that is against God and His ways: “hostile in mind”. It is to act in ways that God says are immoral and wrong: “engaged in evil deeds”. These three elements summarize what it means to be spiritually dead.

III. Commitment #1: I Will Stop Living for Myself

- A. Because everyone enters and continues life in this condition of spiritual death, it is necessary for every person to die to this harmful way of life. God must enable each person to have the capacity to respond to Him in love rather than hostility. In the baptism imagery of verses 12-14, Paul uses the same understanding and principles of baptism explained in Romans 6:3-5 and

² Lev. 26:41-42, Dt. 10:16, 30:6, Jer. 4:4, 9:24-25, Ezek. 44:6-9. It is possible that “the circumcision of Christ” refers to His death on the cross. It could also refer to the circumcision Jesus performs in the heart of the disciple.

³ Phil. 3:3, 1 Pet. 3:21

⁴ Paul elsewhere calls circumcision (and by parallel baptism) a “sign” (Rm. 4:11)—which was its original God given purpose (Gen. 17:1-14). Paul is applying the same understanding and principles to both circumcision and baptism. They both should be understood this way. But this doesn’t necessarily mean baptism replaces circumcision.

⁵ Paul discusses the fact that even those who are baptized can still not be spiritually transformed the way they ought to have been (1 Cor. 10:1-14).

⁶ David W. Pao, [Colossians and Philemon](#), Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 167.

⁷ Ephesians 2:1

⁸ Further described in Ephesians 2:12

Ephesians 2:5-6 (although baptism isn't mentioned).⁹ To die with Jesus, "having been buried with Him in baptism" (v. 12) primarily means two movements of the heart: 1) die to self and 2) die to sin. The person who gets baptized is making the commitment to no longer live a self-centered life because they are claiming to die to themselves: "3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God." (Col. 3:3). The individual getting baptized dies in the sense that they no longer live the life they wanted and instead live the kind of life God wants them to live. Their life will be lived as if Jesus was living their life for them. While Jesus physically died on the cross, disciples spiritually die at their baptism. Disciples die to being spiritually dead.

- B. The person getting baptized also claims to die to sin, as is further explained in chapter three:

⁵ Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. ⁶ For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, ⁷ and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, *and* abusive speech from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, (Col. 3:5-9)

- C. This text is a description of what a spiritually dead person's life looks like. While the perspective is explaining who disciples used to be ("you also once walked, when you were living in them" v. 7), this still gives us a clear picture of what it means to be spiritually dead. To die to sin means to say no to sexual acts that are morally objectionable to God ("immorality"), to stay away from anything that is dirty or impure ("impurity"), to not give in to strong feelings or emotions that lead to wrongdoing ("passion"), cease from self-indulgent cravings that displace proper affections for God ("evil desire"), and the immoderate desire for wealth ("greed").¹⁰ A person who is baptized claims they will no longer live for these motivations, which then alters the following list of behaviors (v. 8).
- D. When the person getting baptized goes down into the water and is immersed, the imagery being communicated is that they are dying to their old way of life that they lived prior to understanding who Jesus is.¹¹ Baptism represents and mimics the commitment to enter the tomb with Jesus.¹² Those of you who have been baptized, do you act as if you are dead to sin and self? Have you ceased living according to that which characterizes those who are spiritually dead and who are separated from God and His kingdom?

⁹ Grant R. Osborne, [Colossians & Philemon: Verse by Verse](#), Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 73–74.

¹⁰ All of these definitions come from Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Colossians 3:5.

¹¹ Michael F. Bird, [Colossians and Philemon](#), New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 79, David W. Pao, [Colossians and Philemon](#), Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 167, Grant R. Osborne, [Colossians & Philemon: Verse by Verse](#), Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 73–74, Joseph Barber Lightfoot, [Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon](#), 8th ed., Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament (London; New York: Macmillan and Co., 1886), 182, William Barclay, [The Letters to Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians](#), 3rd ed. fully rev. and updated., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 162.

¹² James D. G. Dunn, [The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 159.

E. Every true disciple should be able to observe specific and concrete changes in their lifestyle when comparing how they lived prior to knowing Jesus compared to after they know Jesus. True discipleship requires a complete transformation of the direction of our lives. There is a movement from self-focused living to God-focused living, and from resisting what God tells people to do through Jesus and His Word to joyfully embracing Jesus and the teachings of the Bible. If someone doesn't want to do what the Bible says and refuses to do so, they aren't a true disciple—they haven't truly experienced the inner transformation of salvation. The main point being made is that the work of God changes a person's heart in salvation. There must be a noticeable internal change.

IV. Commitment #2: I Will Start Living for God

- A. Dying spiritually is only half of the imagery of baptism. The other major factor is to be spiritually alive, which echoes the resurrection of Jesus ("you were also raised up with Him" v. 12 and "He made you alive together with Him" v. 13). Not only is the person being baptized committing themselves to follow Jesus' example in death, but they are also going to follow His example of resurrection. In this passage, this connection to the resurrection of Jesus is immediate and present in this life. Paul is not talking about the future resurrection that will be experienced but the current impact of Jesus's influence on the life of a disciple. Disciples not only commit themselves to ceasing to live a certain way (selfish and sinful), but they also commit to living a different type of life following their baptism (God-centered, obedient, and righteous). They will live in "newness of life" (Rm. 6:4) by living in a similar manner to the way Jesus lived His life. Disciples begin new habits in addition to ceasing old ones.
- B. As disciples are connected to the resurrection of Jesus, the result is the creation of a new way of life centered around God. This new lifestyle is summarized this way: "¹⁰ so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;" (Col. 1:10). Instead of living to please themselves, disciples live to please God as they start to focus their life's attention on the kingdom of God (Col. 3:1-2).
- C. Being spiritually alive is explained in the following statements of verses 13 and 14, "having forgiven us all our transgressions" (v. 13), "having canceled out the certificate of debt" (v. 14), and "having nailed it to the cross" (v. 14). The main focus of the new life in this text is the idea of "having forgiven all" (v. 13). Every single wrong thought, desire, and action are forgiven at the cross. A person's sin, in total, is taken care of. So much so, that the very record and document of it is destroyed. This is a key spiritual reality involved in salvation. A person's moral and spiritual rap sheet before God is canceled by the work of Jesus on the cross and the work of God in a person's heart.
- D. While this passage only emphasizes the notion of forgiveness and the removal of guilt in reference to being spiritually alive, the idea of being spiritually alive encompasses a lot more than just forgiveness, as is clear from the more detailed explanation found in chapter three:
- ¹² So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord

forgave you, so also should you. ¹⁴ Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. ¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. (Col. 3:12-17)

- E. Like the description of being spiritually dead, being spiritually alive involves inner transformation that is explained in specific ways. Spiritual life leads to a changed heart that is filled with an awareness of and sympathy for the suffering of others (“compassion”), being warmhearted, considerate, humane, and gentle (“kindness”), the disposition of assessing oneself accurately and appropriately (“humility), acting in a manner that is gentle, mild, and even-tempered (“gentleness”), etc. To be spiritually alive is to become a new person and live a life that is empowered by God to be the person He creates us to be. Those who get baptized are saying that they want to be this kind of person and will intentionally pursue it.
- F. As a person comes out of the water, it represents the person’s commitment to live a new type of life under the influence of Jesus and His teachings through the power of the Holy Spirit.¹³ Are you becoming the type of person whose life is defined by the list of internal qualities found in chapter three? Do these virtues make up the quality of your character? Is it your hope, goal, and ambition to be this kind of person?
- G. Those who get baptized are testifying that God has changed their heart which is going to lead to a change of life. Baptism is a public claim that says God has redirected your life so that you will seek His kingdom. Those who have been baptized in the past have more information from which to judge if they are carrying through with their baptismal commitment or not. Watching other people get baptized is a good opportunity for all disciples to renew their commitment to Jesus and review how well they are doing in that commitment. The longer a person has followed Jesus, the more they will understand the depth of the commitment they made at their baptism.

V. Conclusion

- A. Everyone who is baptized has the responsibility to live under the teachings of Jesus: “⁶ Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, *so* walk in Him, ⁷ having been firmly rooted *and now* being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, *and* overflowing with gratitude.” (Col. 2:6-7). This is a summary of the Christian life. This is what it means to follow Jesus.
- B. Be encouraged to continue to trust Jesus by being established and continuing in the life Jesus offers while refusing to be moved away from the hope found in the message of Jesus (Col. 1:23). To better understand what this means, read the rest of Colossians.

¹³ Grant R. Osborne, *Colossians & Philemon: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 73–74, Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 8th ed., Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament (London; New York: Macmillan and Co., 1886), 182, William Barclay, *The Letters to Philipians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, 3rd ed. fully rev. and updated., The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 162.

VI. Questions for Further Thought

- A. Paul wants disciples to put their full confidence in Jesus alone for forgiveness. How would you respond to someone who claims, “It is arrogant to believe only Jesus provides access to God”?
- B. How did Jesus explain the transition from being spiritually dead to alive in Lk. 15:11-32? What do you notice about being spiritually dead verses spiritually alive?
- C. In what other ways are genuine disciples united with Jesus that are expressed in baptism (Rom. 6:3-22)?
- D. What kinds of things are people tempted to “add” to faith in Jesus to secure God’s favor or forgiveness?
- E. What other qualities of the new self are mentioned in Eph. 4:23-32?