

“BURIED AND RAISED WITH CHRIST”

I. Introduction

- A. Our Westminster Larger Catechism speaks of the duty of “improving our baptism,” by which it means that we should continually be appropriating by faith the realities that baptism signifies and seals.
- B. We see something similar to this in Martin Luther’s Small Catechism, where he explains the ongoing significance of baptism by saying that it tells us that the whole Christian life is a life in which “the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”
- C. This closely relates to what Paul is talking about in these verses from Colossians 2.
- D. After saying in verse 10 that we have been filled in Christ, verses 11-15 give a more detailed description of the benefits that we receive through our union with Christ.
- E. Paul directs the Colossians to remember their baptism as the way to guard against the false teachers who are trying to lead them astray.

II. A Circumcision Made Without Hands

- A. Our text begins with the statement, “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.”
 - 1. The fact that Paul speaks of circumcision here may indicate that the false teachers were telling the Colossians that they had to undergo the rite of circumcision in order to enjoy true communion with God.

2. Paul confronts any such notion by telling the Colossian Christians that in Christ they have already been circumcised “with a circumcision made without hands.”
 3. Under the Old Testament administration of the covenant of grace, circumcision was the outward sign of membership in God’s covenant community.
 4. It was the sign that marked Israel out as belonging to God.
 5. It was a highly symbolic ritual, as the foreskin of the male reproductive organ was cut off, signifying the removal of sin and being set apart to belong to God.
- B. Paul says that the circumcision that the Colossians received was one that was done not by human hands, but “by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ.”
1. What does he mean by these phrases “putting off the body of the flesh” and “the circumcision of Christ”?
 2. You will notice that these phrases are set in apposition to each other, which means they are referring to the same thing.
 3. We might be inclined to think that “the body of the flesh” is referring to the Christian’s sinful nature, which is put to death when we place our faith in Christ.
 4. However, this is not what Paul means in the only other instance where he uses this phrase, which is found in Colossians 1:22.
 5. That verse reads, “And you... he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death.”
 6. In that verse, “body of flesh” clearly refers to Christ’s physical body, which he offered up in death so that we could be reconciled to God.

7. For this reason, it seems most likely that the phrases “putting off the body of flesh” and “the circumcision of Christ” are referring to Christ’s death on the cross.
- C. This makes good sense when we consider the spiritual meaning of circumcision under the old covenant.
1. In that physical circumcision, a part of the body was removed in order to signify cleansing from sin and deliverance from judgment.
 2. As the old covenant sign of the promised salvation, circumcision pointed to the cross of Christ.
 3. The cutting off of the foreskin on Israelite males (in whom Israelite females were also represented) symbolized the threat of being cut off from God’s blessings if the covenant promise was renounced.
 4. At the same time, circumcision symbolized that those who put their trust in God’s promise will pass safely through his judgment because their faith unites them to Christ, who was cut off in judgment on the cross.
 5. This is why Paul describes Jesus’ death on the cross as “the circumcision of Christ” here in Colossians 2.
 6. On the cross, Christ’s body is the “body of flesh” that was “put off.”
 7. As one commentator puts it, “Here is a circumcision which entailed not the stripping off of a small portion of flesh but the violent removal of the whole body in death.”
 8. Every believer, whether under the old covenant or under the new covenant, experiences the spiritual reality to which circumcision pointed.
 9. True circumcision is a matter of identification with Christ in his crucifixion as a satisfaction of divine justice.

10. Those who receive this “circumcision made without hands” have a safe passage through the death-judgment and are raised with Christ unto justification.
11. Furthermore, those who are circumcised in Christ also die to sin, continually putting off of the old man through the spiritual transformation of sanctification.

III. Buried and Raised in Baptism

- A. Paul continues in verse 12 by saying that we were circumcised in Christ by being “buried with him in baptism” and being subsequently raised with him through faith.
 1. This tells us that Jesus’ death is also the reality to which baptism points.
 2. This is reflective of the fact that Jesus referred to his death as a baptism on multiple occasions. (see Mk. 10:38-39; Lk. 12:50)
 3. He did so because, like circumcision, baptism simultaneously signifies judgment and deliverance.
 4. This is made clear by the New Testament passages that point back to the Noahic flood and to Israel’s deliverance from the Red Sea as types of baptism. (1 Pet. 3:18-20; 1 Cor. 10:1-4)
 5. In both of those instances, water was employed as an instrument of judgment for the world and as the means of setting apart a people for God.
 6. For some, the water was a baptism of judgment, and for others it was a baptism of deliverance.
 7. Here in Colossians, Paul refers to Christ’s death as both a circumcision and a baptism because in these rites the participant undergoes a symbolic covenant judgment that serves as a sign of deliverance from that judgment.

8. In other words, when we trust in Christ, we are delivered from judgment because on the cross he underwent the covenantal curse to secure the blessings of the covenant for us.
 9. By faith, Christ's death is counted as our death, and his resurrection is counted as our resurrection.
- B. It is significant that Paul uses both circumcision and baptism to describe our inclusion in Christ.
1. Circumcision was the sign of covenant membership in the Old Testament, and baptism is the sign of covenant membership in the New Testament.
 2. Paul brings the two together in reference to the cross of Christ.
 3. The cross is the bridge between the covenants.
 4. The old covenant pointed forward to the cross, and the new covenant points back to the cross.
- C. This connection between the two covenant signs helps us to understand why the church practices infant baptism.
1. While some Christians argue that infant baptism is something that was inherited from Roman Catholicism, it is actually rooted in our belief that the New Testament is the fulfillment, not the replacement, of the Old Testament.
 2. In the Old Testament, God commanded that Jewish infant males be circumcised when they were eight days old.
 3. Even though they were only infants, the children of believers were given the sign of inclusion in the covenant community.
 4. God claimed the children of Israelites as his own, defining the visible church as a body that consists of believers and their children.

5. Listen to what he says in Ezekiel 16: "And you took your sons and your daughters, whom you had borne *to me*, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your whorings so small a matter that you slaughtered *my children* and delivered them up as an offering by fire to them?" (Ezek. 16:20)
6. In this passage where God is rebuking the Israelites for handing their children over to idols, he calls the children of the Israelites "my children."
7. We see the same thing in the New Testament.
8. Listen to what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7: "To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, *they are holy.*" (1 Cor. 7:12-14)
9. Paul says that children who have at least one Christian parent are "holy."
10. This does not mean that they are automatically saved by virtue of their birth into a Christian family.
11. That wasn't even true in the Old Testament.
12. What Paul is saying is that the children of believers are set apart as those who outwardly belong to the covenant community, as were the children of believers under the old covenant.
13. It is in this sense that God claims them as his own and holds them responsible for receiving by faith the promises that are held forth to those within the covenant people.

14. This is why we conclude that the covenant sign of baptism should be applied to the children of believers.

IV. Forgiven of Our Trespasses

- A. Baptism signifies our union with Jesus Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection through faith.
 1. Paul says in verses 13 and 14 that through our union with Christ we have been forgiven of all of our trespasses because on the cross Christ canceled the record of our debt.
 2. God's law makes us all debtors.
 3. No one can keep the law, and thus it renders a death verdict upon everyone.
 4. But those who have been united to Christ by faith have died with him and been raised with him.
 5. This is what Martin Luther referred to as the "wondrous exchange."
 6. Christ takes our sins upon himself and gives us his righteousness and his life.
 7. In the words of one commentator, Christ "took that signed acknowledgement of indebtedness which stood as a perpetual witness against them and cancelled it by his death. It might even be said that he took the document, ordinances and all, and nailed it to the cross as an act of triumphant defiance in the face of those blackmailing powers that were holding it over men and women in order to command their allegiance." [Bruce]
- B. Our union with Christ also means that we share in the victory that he has won over the forces of evil.

1. Paul says in verse 15 that Jesus “disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”
2. This language refers to the Roman military practice of spreading the news of a conquest by marching vanquished enemies through a victory parade.
3. At the cross, Jesus did this to the demonic powers that are aligned against us.
4. This truth was of great relevance for the Colossian believers as they contended with the claim of the false teachers that it was necessary for them to pay reverence to the astral powers that served as intermediaries between man and God.
5. Christ has disarmed those powers and put them to open shame.
6. They no longer have any claim on us.
7. Of course, like an army in retreat, the forces of evil still have power and they can still inflict damage in this present age.
8. But we can be confident that their defeat is as certain as the canceling of our debts.
9. Both Satan and sin have lost their hold over us, because in his cross Christ has secured our victory and our forgiveness.

V. Conclusion

- A. Those who lay hold of Christ by faith receive all of the benefits that are found in him.
- B. Christ has set you free.
- C. He has secured all that is needed for your salvation.
- D. Don't try to supplement Christ.

- E. Don't downplay what he has accomplished for you.
- F. Cherish the redemption that you have in your Savior.
- G. The more you embrace and appreciate all that you have in him, the less attractive and less plausible will the empty deceit of the world appear.