

'Buried with Him in Baptism'
Colossians 2:12

June 13, 2010

A. The Context of the Text

1. refuting false teachings in the early church
 - a. the error in the churches of Galatia^A
 - b. the error in the church at Colossi^B
2. the spiritual emphasis of Colossians 2:11-12

B. Subject of the Text: Union with Christ

1. a mystical union
 - a. it is a mystery^C
 - b. it is spiritual^D
2. the Union with Christ in Circumcision (verse 11)
 - a. in relation to His death^E
 - b. in relation to our hearts^F

3. the Union with Christ in Baptism (verse 12)
 - a. in burial and resurrection^G
 - b. in relation to our faith^H

C. Believer's Baptism

1. compared to Old Testament Circumcision^I
 - a. similarities
 - b. distinction
2. Baptism Does Not Save^J
3. Baptism Is for Believers^K
4. Baptism Is a Matter of Obedience^L
5. Baptism Is by Immersion

^A Acts 15:1, Galatians 1:6-8, 5:6

^B Colossians 2:8-23, 1:13-20

^C Romans 6:5-7, Galatians 2:20

^D 1 Corinthians 12:13

^E John 19:30, Luke 23:46, 1 Peter 2:24, 3:18

^F Deuteronomy 10:16, Ezekiel 11:19, Romans 2:29

^G Romans 6:3-4

^H Romans 10:9, Colossians 2:13-14

^I Genesis 17:12-14, Exodus 12:48, Joshua 5:4-5

^J Titus 3:5, 1 Corinthians 12:13

^K Acts 2:41; 8:36-39; 9:17-18, 9:44-48; 16:14-15, 30-33; 19:1-7

^L Matthew 28:18-20

A. Today's text describes believer's baptism – 'having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.'

1. Alexander Carson was ordained in the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in 1798. To refute the baptists, he began to study the NT; but as a result became a baptist himself, and later wrote a classic book on baptism, *Baptism in its Mode and Subjects Considered*. Here is the gist of what he wrote in the preface to that book: 'Nothing can be farther from the intention of the following work than to widen the breach among Christians of different denominations, ... There are two extremes which I wish to avoid – on the one hand, a spirit of liberalism that ... hesitates not to sacrifice the commandments of God to ... (Christian Unity) – on the other, that sort of dogmatism that ... is reluctant to acknowledge the people of the Lord in any denomination but its own ... But while I gladly admit, that many who differ from me with respect to baptism are among the excellent of the earth, I cannot out of (respect) to them, abstain from (defending) this ordinance of Christ.' May that same spirit be reflected in this sermon.

2. Paul's letters, or epistles, to the churches

- a. were usually written to correct problems in the lives, worship or doctrine of the churches and their members
- b. the letter to the churches of Galatia, for example, refuted the false teaching first described in Acts 15: 1, 'Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."'
 - (A) such men were teaching the Galatians churches that, in effect, they first must become Jews to be Christians
 - (B) Paul denies that, summing it up in Galatians 5:6, 'For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.'
- c. the false teaching prevalent in Colosse was a different kind
 - (A) circumcision was not the point of argument
 - (B) the false teaching was a mixture of human philosophies and a form of theosophy that
 - (1) worshipped orders of angels, rulers & authorities
 - (2) observed certain holy days

(3) practised restrictions in eating and drinking

(4) in short, they added all sorts of teaching to the simple gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ

(C) the Scripture reading, Colossians 2:8-23, refutes these

(1) verse 8 warns of these philosophies: 'See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.'

(2) verse 9 emphasizes the sufficiency of Jesus Christ: 'For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,' (a summary of Colossians 1:13-20)

(3) verse 10 says that for this reason, the Christian is fully complete in Jesus Christ: 'and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority' – it is Christ, who deserves our worship, not any subordinate ruler or authority

(4) verses 11-12 go on to support these statements by describing the character of our salvation in Christ:

3. '11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.'

a. now it is very clear in these verses that Paul is not talking of physical circumcision, nor, in his parallel reference to baptism, is he talking primarily of baptism by water

b. Paul is talking about the spiritual realities behind these two external symbols, circumcision and baptism

c. this is clearly shown by those words, 'made without hands'

d. furthermore, the meaning is twisted if we then understand the next reference to be about a baptism 'made with hands'

e. so, before talking about baptism by water this morning, let us first seek to understand the spiritual reality behind it

B. Paul's primary subject in these verses is our union with Christ

1. we call this union with Christ a mystical union;

a. by which is meant two things

(A) it is mysterious, i.e., beyond human understanding

- (B) it is spiritual, i.e., effected by the Holy Spirit of God
- b. it is mysterious, for one thing, in that it exists in both time and in eternity
 - (A) it exists for the believer in here and now as he lives in Christ – in union; abiding in Christ and Christ in him
 - (B) but it also existed at the cross; Romans 6:5-7: 5 For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; 7 for he who has died is freed from sin.
 - (C) that says that, in Christ, we died at the cross; so does also Galatians 2:20: 'I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.'
- c. this mystic union with Christ is also spiritual
 - (A) it is not the result of our own striving, nor can it be perceived by our natural senses
 - (B) it is by the Holy Spirit that we are united into the body of Christ: 'For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.' (1 Corinthians 12:13) – note the use of 'baptism' here
- d. to illustrate that union with Christ, Paul uses two figures: that of circumcision and that of baptism

2. the Union with Christ in Circumcision

- a. consider those words in verse 11, 'in Him (that is union) you were also circumcised ... by the circumcision of Christ'
- b. now what circumcision is it talking about?
- c. it cannot be that which Jesus underwent as an 8-day old baby, except to the extent that it made Him perfect Israel
- d. it is explained by the phrase, 'the removal of the body of flesh' – a phrase that is full of meaning
 - (A) first, as is in keeping with the context, it was on the cross that Jesus Christ put off his earthly body, when first He cried 'It is finished' (John 19:30) and then 'Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit,' and died – that was the circumcision of Christ, the cutting off of the fleshly part of his being, the body in death
 - (B) second, implicit in his bodily death was the fact that the body of Jesus Christ was the recipient of

man's sin; 1 Peter says, '2:24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. ... 3:18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit'

- (C) this circumcision of Christ relates to our sins: in God's eyes when Christ died, we also died in Him
- e. but circumcision in Christ has another spiritual meaning, the circumcision of the heart
 - (A) God through Moses said, 'So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer.' (Deuteronomy 10:16)
 - (B) and in Ezekiel 11:19, 'And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh'
 - (C) while Paul defines the real Jew in Romans 2:29, 'But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.'
 - (D) spiritual circumcision is that heart change taking place at salvation by the work of God's Holy Spirit
 - (E) this comes about by our union with Jesus Christ

3. the Union with Christ in Baptism

- a. by our being in Christ, when He put off His flesh, we died with him; that union with Christ continued as follows
 - (A) we have been buried with Him
 - (B) we have been raised with Him
- b. Romans 6:3-4 states this truth in other words: '3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.'
- c. you and I are very aware of the activity of our old nature, but in God's eyes, it is truly dead: it died when Christ died
- d. on the other hand, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was the central theme of the early church. N. T. Wright, puts it this way: "Why did Christianity arise, and why did it take the shape it did?" The early Christians themselves reply: "We exist because of Jesus' resurrection..." There is no evidence for a form

of early Christianity in which the resurrection was not a central belief. Nor was this belief, as it were, bolted on to Christianity at the edge. It was the central driving force, informing the whole movement. —{2}.r

- e. and as surely as Jesus Christ was raised from the dead by the power of God, so surely is the believer raised to a newness of life in his union with Jesus Christ his Lord
- f. Cameron, a 10-year-old boy had come to his pastor saying he would like to be baptized along with some others who had put up there hands in Sunday School. The pastor asked, 'Are you doing this just because the others are?' 'No,' he said, 'I am doing it because it means I belong to God.' As arrangements were being made for his baptism in the church that Sunday, he said, 'Do I have to do it in church; why can't I be baptized in the river like Jesus?' 'But, Cameron, if you are baptized in the river, how would people recognize you've been baptised?' 'I guess by my new way of living,' he said. —{3}.
- g. and that is the essence of our union with Christ in baptism

4. a final note or two from this passage

- a. central to verse 12, the raising up of the believer to new life along with the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we find that it is 'through faith in the working of God'
- b. the gospel, the word of faith which Paul preached, has this truth: 'that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved' (Romans 10:9); faith's object is God; faith is the God-given means by which we are saved
- c. the result of the faith that accompanies union with Christ is given in verse 13-14, '13 When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh (our old nature), He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14 having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.' (Colossians 2:13-14)
- d. now let us make some observations on the matter of

C. Believer's Baptism

1. let's compare OT Circumcision to NT Baptism

- a. there are some similarities between these two
 - (A) both mark the participant part of the people of God

- (B) in the OT circumcision was given to Abraham
 - (1) it sealed the covenant between him and God
 - (2) it applied beyond Abraham's family to his servants
- (C) a mixed multitude, proselytes, accompanied Israel out of Egypt; these, along with Jacob's descendants, had to be circumcised according to the Law of Moses for any of them to be truly a part of Israel
- (D) uniformly in the NT it is those who are baptized into the name of Jesus Christ who are added to the church, the visible body of Christ, of God's people in the world
- b. but there are differences, as well
 - (A) the OT circumcision was prescribed for infants, but there is no NT command for infant baptism, and the arguments for it are only based on analogy
 - (B) circumcision and baptism are distinct and different; a Jew would never confuse them; in fact, the Jewish Talmud (Mishnah) says concerning a proselyte: '**... If he assents to all, they circumcise him at once, and when he is healed they baptise him, and two scholars stand by and tell him of some of the light and some of the heavy laws. When he has been baptised, he is regarded in all respects as an Israelite.**'^{-(4)'} The same source says there was no shortage of 'immersion pools' for to do this in NT times.

2. Baptism Does Not Save

- a. this is a lesson that we seek to make most clear in the baptismal classes we have with candidates
- b. that is why we spent time in the passage, to see that our salvation only comes by our union with Jesus Christ in His work on the cross whereby He took our very place: He died for our sins; He was raised for our justification
- c. baptism is a work, a deed; salvation is by grace: '**He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit**' (Titus 3:5)
- d. only spiritual baptism brings salvation; as we read: '**by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body**' (1 Cor. 12:13)

3. Baptism Is for Believers

- a. as you read through the book of Acts, invariably the order is that those who believed were baptized
- b. Acts 19: 1ff is instructive: Paul met about 12 disciples, believers, yet who had not even heard of the Holy Spirit, only knowing John's baptism of repentance; they were then baptized again in the Name of the Lord Jesus

4. Baptism Is a Matter of Obedience

- a. it is part of Jesus' Great commission to His disciples – 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' (Matthew 28:18-20 NAS95) – that command has never been rescinded; it stands today even as it did then
- b. elsewhere baptism is described as the answer or appeal for a good conscience toward God; a matter of obeying

5. Baptism must be by Immersion if it is to illustrate this union

- a. I came across an interesting illustration about the Greek words used for dip and immerse. **Nicander was a Greek poet and physician of about 200BC and he gives a recipe for making pickles. Nicander says that in order to make a pickle, the vegetable should first be `dipped' (bapto) into boiling water and then `baptized' (baptizo) in the vinegar solution. Both verbs concern the immersing of vegetables in a solution. But the first is temporary. The second, the act of baptizing the vegetable, produces a permanent change.**^{5}.
- b. As we see in Colossians 2:9-13, it is our union with Jesus Christ which brings us salvation, illustrated by baptism, that makes the permanent change in our lives. I will not labour the point, but only baptism by immersion makes valid the illustration Paul is using.

- D. Conclusion – if you have been considering this matter of baptism, or would like to join our baptismal classes to learn more, then I invite you to speak with Carlos or myself after the service.

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Various other English versions of the Holy Bible may be used in this sermon. Some (for example, the AV, ASV, and NAS) seek to be strictly translations, while others (and especially PHIL) contain paraphrasing which involves a certain amount of subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, there is little material difference in meaning among these. Some prove slightly clearer on some verses than others. Looking at more than one version sometimes sheds additional light on any particular verse. Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in {braces}. The versions are identified as:

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
ERV	The Revised Version of 1885
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Further sermons and illustrations may be found at the web-site, www.holwick.com. Materials in this sermon from Rev. David Holwick's database are identified by “Kerux” followed by a sermon or illustration number.

2. The Resurrection Has Always Been a Central Belief – Kerux illustrations #6510
3. Adapted from ‘A Child’s Grasp of Baptism’ – Kerux illustrations #1323
4. Babylonian Talmud, Yebamoth 47a, quoted in *The Biblical Doctrine of Initiation*, by R. E. O. White, 1960, Wm B. Eerdmans (a book to be used with some care); the Mkiwaoth tractate of the Mishna describes the Immersion Pools.
5. From, *Baptizing Pickles* – Kerux illustrations #30180