

PREFACE

We are presently in the middle of an extended paragraph that contains the most eloquent concentration of statements regarding the believer's relationship to Christ Jesus. Here Paul bases his argument for the believer's stand against "hollow and deceptive philosophy."

His argument is not that we *follow* Christ—though we do.

His argument is not that we *subscribe to His teaching*—though we do.

His argument is not that we *love* Christ—though we do.

Paul's argument for faithfulness to Christ, in Colossians 2:6-15, is based on the believer's mystical yet very real *union* with Him. Just look at how this passage is peppered with this truth. [[see p6 of PDF](#)]

Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk **in Him**, 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. (vv6-7)

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. (v8)

For **in Him** all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and **in Him** you have been made complete, and **He is** the head over all rule and authority; (vv9-10)

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; 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. (vv11-12)

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, **He** made you alive together **with Him**, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled 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. When **He** had disarmed the rulers and authorities, **He** made a public display of them, having triumphed over them **through Him**. (vv13-15)
Colossians 2:6-15

We walk **in Him**.

We are built up **in Him**.

We have been made complete **in Him** because **in Him** is the fullness of God, and thus He is "head over all rule and authority."

We have been cleansed, purified **in Him**, and made alive—through death, burial, and resurrection—**with Him**.

Our relationship with Christ—indeed, with the fullness of the Godhead—is not just that of a student to his teacher,
not just that of a worshiper to his deity,
not just that of a follower to his lord,
but of someone physically, spiritually, *viscerally* **in** his Savior and Lord.

This is the setting—the environment—for our consideration today of vv11-12.

v11: CIRCUMCISION

So we are not just in the middle of a paragraph, but in the middle of a sentence as we turn to v11. Let's back up and read from v8.

Read Colossians 2:8-12.

Before we get into v11 I want to reiterate something with which I closed in our last session ([quotation from Curtis Vaughan](#)), a perfect illustration of this unique relationship every believer—and the community of believers, the church—has with Christ Jesus.

Whatever powers there are in the universe, whatever ranks and orders of authority and government, they all owe their being to Christ and are under His lordship. It is important to observe that though Christ is here described as Head, the powers and authorities are not called His body. That distinction is reserved for Christ's people.

Christ is "head," Lord over all rule and authority, but none of those entities are bonded to Him like each believer in His body, the church. No one else has the relationship with Christ enjoyed by believers. We are filled by Him, made complete in Him, and, as His body, enjoy a unique intimacy with Him.

The Lord loves metaphors and symbols; He uses them throughout Scripture. Think Jeremiah's clay jar (Jeremiah 19), Hosea's harlot wife, Gomer (Hosea 1-4), Jesus' seeds growing by the side of the road (Matthew 13).

In v12 Paul addresses the symbol of baptism; here in v11 Paul refers to one of the the Lord's most ancient and enduring symbols: circumcision.

Read v11.

In Genesis 17 the Lord established circumcision with Abraham—and note: from the outset it was understood to be just a sign, a token of a covenant.

Read Genesis 17:10-11.

Circumcision was an outward "sign" of something that could not be seen by man. Even back in those days the idea of circumcision was being used as a metaphor representing the conversion of a fleshly nature to a righteous nature.

Read Deuteronomy 30:6.

Even so (and not surprisingly), the Jews insisted that it was the outward sign that made the critical difference between Gentile and Jew. And, to a certain extent they were correct: to have one's male offspring circumcised demonstrated obedience to Yahweh, and His covenantal Law. However, the fact that the child was only eight days old when the rite was performed meant that the circumcision said nothing about the level of obedience of the child himself. *He* wasn't being obedient; his parents were.

So the apostle Paul expresses clearly and succinctly in his letter to the Romans what the Lord always intended by circumcision.

Read Romans 2:28-29.

circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.

From the beginning, circumcision, like believer's baptism, was meant to be an *outward* sign of something that was already in place on the *inside*. It was a fleshly demonstration of a supernatural, internal change in the individual. Originally, for the Jew, circumcision of the male child on the eighth day signified his part in the Jewish community by blood, and implying his allegiance—and, especially, obedience—to Yahweh and His Law.

In Christ the outward sign became meaningless. The requirements of the Law were fulfilled in His atoning sacrifice—once for all. No longer is circumcision required—indeed, in the early church it would become a stumbling block to true faith:

- used by the Judaizers in the Galatian church, who claimed that Christians must also follow the Mosaic Law, and be circumcised;
- and although the textual evidence is thin in the Colossian letter, something similar may have been going on there.

The phrase “made without hands,” in the negative, translates one Greek word that in the positive effectively means “made by God.” The NIV suggests this with its “done by the hands of men” (emphasis added).

And Douglas Moo points out that the verbs here (vv11-12) are all in the *past* (Greek *aorist*) tense. Why? Verse 10 has the answer:

...in Him [Christ] you have been made complete,

All that needed to be done has already been done—and God through Christ did it.

the circumcision of Christ

This Paul calls the all-sufficient “circumcision of Christ.” In Scripture circumcision is used as a metaphor representing the removal of sinful flesh, or the removal of the proclivity toward sin. Circumcision performed by man is only an external sign that does nothing to the condition of the heart. But the “circumcision of Christ” doesn't bother with an outward sign—it goes straight to the heart, removing (or “putting off” the “body of the flesh,” or (NIV) “sinful nature.”

We can all attest to the fact that at least a remnant of “sinful nature” still resides in us, so this cannot mean that Christ's circumcision removes it 100%. What it means is that what has been removed is the “enervating power of our fleshly nature or propensity” (Moo)

[enervating = deprived of strength, weakening, debilitating] The sin nature we were born with is no longer the dominant force it once was.

For further illumination of this concept—and a perfect segue into v12—lets read how Paul speaks of it in his letter to the Romans.

Read Romans 6:3-11.

12: BAPTISM

And now, just as in the Romans passage, in v12 baptism is portrayed as a participation in Christ's death and resurrection—thus, from one perspective, water baptism becomes a symbolic reenactment of the “circumcision of Christ” (F. F. Bruce)—not the physical circumcision performed on Jesus when He was eight days old, but the spiritual circumcision performed on *us* by Him. That is, when we are baptized we publicly declare the internal removal of our “body of the flesh”—the stripping away of sin's power in our life.

Read vv11-12.

What is Paul saying here? What is the relationship between baptism and spiritual circumcision? Is baptism when that actually takes place, or is baptism like circumcision under the law: just an outward symbol? There is considerable scholarly debate on this verse.

Perhaps the best answer to this is that a good case can be made for Paul referring (in v12) to our *spiritual* baptism, rather than water baptism, since in v11 he is clearly speaking of *spiritual* circumcision—one “made without hands.” The second (water) baptism, like OT circumcision, is a public, outward symbol or sign of what has already taken place inside.

Curtis Vaughan: Baptism, then, is not a magic rite, but an act of obedience in which we confess our faith and symbolize the essence of our spiritual experience. Faith is the instrumental cause of that experience and, apart from real faith, baptism is an empty, meaningless ceremony.

I am fascinated by how something Paul writes in Galatians ties in with this passage. It is not only a beautiful word picture, it may help clarify for us this business of how and why he associates baptism with circumcision in our passage.

Read Galatians 3:26-27.

When I read that passage a light bulb came on in my head. [\[see last page of PDF\]](#)

clothed^{nasb, niv}, **put on**^{kjvs, esv} = *endyo* (en-doo'-oh) = from <G1722> (en) and <G1416> (duno) (**in the sense of sinking into a garment**); **to invest with clothing** (literal or figurative) :- array, **clothe** (with), **endue**, **have (put) on**.

Keep your finger in Galatians and go back to v11 in Colossians.

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;

removal^{nasb}, **putting off** = *apekdysis* (ap-ek'-doo-sis) = **divestment**, **putting off**, stripping off.

In the middle of this word is the Greek *ekdyo*, which means “to cause to sink out” (of, especially, clothing). In the Galatians passage it is *endyo*—to sink *in* or into.

So now, let's put this all together. As it says in Colossians, at conversion, Christ "circumcises" us—stripping off the filthy, worn-out clothing we were born with: the power of the sin nature. We are left naked, needing something to replace what was removed. And Christ supplies that. As it states in Galatians, we are given brand new, clean clothing with which to cover ourselves: **Christ Himself!** All of this is based on faith—"through faith in the working of God"—and occurs at our spiritual baptism, when we are buried with Christ, then raised up with Him—just like God the Father raised Jesus from the dead.

What's the difference between the first and second baptism? Just this: aside from the difference in chronology (at the first we are saved; at the second we are *declaring we have been saved*) at the second (water) baptism we leave the water; at the first (spiritual) baptism, we remain *in Christ*—we are "raised up with Him."

In brand new, clean clothes.

In Him.

Colossians 2:6-15

Just Jesus
a study of Colossians

Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk **in Him**, 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. (vv6-7)

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[**Christ** / **God the Father** / **Undetermined**]

Galatians 3:27

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

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Colossians 2:11

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